SPECIAL ISSUE

the Chaplain

A JOURNAL FOR PROTESTANT CHAPLAINS

Major Trends and Issues in Theology Today

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DEMYTHOLOGIZING AND THE GOSPEL

by John Macquarrie

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REINHOLD NEIBUHR AND PAUL TILLICH

Two Ways in American Protestant Theology

by Will Herberg

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ARTICLES by Theodore A. Gill, Paul L. Hammer, William E. Hordern, Carl Michalson, and William R. Mueller

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The Listening Post

FOR many months now the office of THE CHAPLAIN has served as a kind of listening post. The Editors, not being theologians themselves, have questioned those who can speak with authority and have listened with eager interest to the growing volume of replies.

In a letter to a score of theologians from coast to coast, we asked: "What are the major areas of thought and discussion in theology today?" The replies were various. But here are the themes mentioned more than once: the "demythologizing controversy" associated with Rudolf Bultmann, the relation of Christianity to the arts, existentialism and the new questioning of its adequacy, the resumption of a dialogue between theologians and philosophers, the meaning of history, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of the church, and the serious dialogue beginning quietly between Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians.

The initial article of this issue, by Will Herberg, was sought at the suggestion of Nathan Scott, who said: "Tillich is, of course, the most influential figure on the American theological scene today, but in the years, say, from 1935 to 1950, when many men in the chaplaincy received their theological training, it was Reinhold Niebuhr who was the great magisterial presence in American theology. . . . Now I think an article that really attempted in plain, straightforward language to expose how precipitous is the divide between Niebuhr and Tillich would be tremendously exciting for men in the chaplaincy who've come out of seminary in the last twenty years."

It was Scott, also, who said: "One of the most important frontiers of theological reflection today is, I believe, that on which the Christian community is attempting to negotiate a really serious transaction with the important imaginative literature of the modern period." The article here by William Mueller is a result of this suggestion.

Robert McAfee Brown felt that this issue should contain an article appraising the significance of Karl Barth on the present scene. "Barth's basic works are rapidly becoming available in English," he said. "Seven volumes of the 'Church Dogmatics' are already in English. I doubt that

many chaplains are going to wade through many of these volumes, but, through them, Barth's influence on American theology is bound to increase as these filtrate down through the seminaries. There are such amazing misunderstandings of Barth current in this country, which can now be seen to be quite inaccurate, that an article is needed indicating the kind of positive concerns in Barth's more recent theological writings."

Needless to say, our period is still marked by the upsurge of biblical theology.

Francis Bouquet notes that this resurgence of biblical theology "is accompanied by the rediscovery of Patrology and its relevance for biblical interpretation on the philosophical level."

Looking ahead, Arnold Come sees that "the revival of interest in a doctrine of the nature of the church is now moving beyond the stage of general theory and concentrating on specific issues. The most important one of these is the role of the laity in the mission of the church. Hendrick Kraemer's new book on *A Theology of the Laity* is the best book on this subject for Protestants."

Come notes, also, that "studies on the Holy Spirit are coming in increasing numbers. Tillich's awaited third volume of his 'Systematic Theology' will concentrate on this doctrine, and Barth is gradually developing his views in his latest volumes." (Come himself is the author this year of *Human Spirit and Holy Spirit.*)

A third trend is noted by him: "Christianity has not yet worked out a good way of explaining the relation of faith and ethics. It is becoming a crucial problem in our day. Paul Lehmann's first volume in this field should be published some time this next year. It should be a helpful stride in accomplishing this task, as he works out of and beyond the deep insights contained in Bonhoeffer's posthumous *Ethics.*"

Finally, we must keep in mind the implications of the new physics for theology and philosophy. Says Stanley Hopper: "The change in cosmological outlook, which we have not yet assimilated, effects a change in our ways of understanding the entire terminology of reference that developed in the Aristotelian intellectualistic framework. . . . The development of theological method in a form parallel with that of the newer scientific methods will continue to be explored."

—J. A. L.

WILL HERBERG

Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich

Two Ways in American Protestant Theology

THE MOST important theological debate in American Protestantism today—that between Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich—is taking place with almost no public controversy outside of seminary circles. This strange reticence is the result only in part of such adventitious circumstances as Niebuhr's recent illness; primarily it would seem to be due to the character of the issues and the personalities of the protagonists. For the issues between Niebuhr and Tillich are not so much differences over doctrine, lending themselves to detailed and piecemeal discussion, as global differences of fundamental outlook and orientation, whose very magnitude tends to obscure definition. As for the men themselves, Niebuhr is not a systematic theologian—indeed, he disclaims being a theologian at all; he is merely a Christian apologist and commentator on contemporary affairs, he says—and so he is not impelled to discuss at large the highly "philosophical" questions that are really at issue between him and Tillich. Paul Tillich, on the other hand, is thoroughly the systematician, and he finds it difficult to come to terms with Niebuhr's incidental though trenchant comments on his thinking. Moreover, the two are old friends, and while neither is particularly averse to polemic, public controversy between themselves does not seem to commend itself to either man.

Yet the differences are there, and in my opinion are deep-going and radical. Some understanding of what is at stake would seem to be indispensable for an understanding of contemporary thinking in theology. A survey of the issues from a fresh point of view might therefore prove helpful.

There is nothing particularly novel in the assertion that fundamentally the differences between Tillich and Niebuhr may be reduced to their divergent conceptions of reality and of the categories by which reality is to be interpreted; yet the assertion is true and will bear repetition—provided it is not merely repeated but explained in something of its full scope and meaning.

Both Tillich and Niebuhr—Niebuhr no less than Tillich—are ontologists in the broadest sense of the term, for they both ask the "question about being"—as indeed all of us must do, implicitly if not explicitly, insofar as we think about reality at all. But Niebuhr and Tillich interpret the ontological question in very different ways, and therefore answer it along very different lines. Running deeper than all differences of doctrine or ideology is the distinction between interpretations of ultimate reality made in terms of *nature* and interpretations made in terms of *history*. Nature again may be understood in two ways, either as vitality or as rational structure. In the one case, nature is power; in the other case, it is reason; in both cases, however, it is the search after natures, and above all the search after the nature of being, that is the concern of the ontologist.

Paul Tillich is this kind of ontologist. He explicitly grounds his whole system on the multiple question: "What is being? what does it mean to be? what is the structure of being as such?" This question —for all three questions are really one—is asked by man, and it is in man's self-awareness that the answer can be found. The answer, as Tillich develops it, sees being first in its dynamic aspect as the *power* of being, then being in its rational structure as the *logos* of being, and finally in the synthesis of power and structure as the *life* of being. The three aspects of being, and the relations between them, are elaborated by Tillich with a systematic vision that is truly impressive.

Tillich translates his ontological analysis into theology by means of the formula that is crucial to his entire system: *Being-Itself=God.* Employing this formula, he is able to present the three aspects of being —power, structure, and life—as the ontological equivalents of the three Persons of the Godhead in the classical trinitarian dogma. All the rest of Christian doctrine follows, though it sometimes seems to require rather drastic reinterpretation. What emerges is an ontological theology in the full sense of the term.

It will be noticed that whereas, or rather because, Tillich avails him-

self of the category of "nature" (being), in both its dynamic and structural aspects, he finds no place for history. Tillich has a good deal to say about history, and much of what he says is profound; but history is not a primary category with him, and it does not easily fit into his system. His analysis of being—human and divine—is essentially a conceptual analysis of ontological structures. It is here that Niebuhr takes fundamental issue with him. "When we deal with aspects of reality which exhibit a freedom above and beyond structures," Niebuhr insists, "we must resort to the Hebraic *dramatic* and *historical* way of apprehending reality. Both the divine and the human self belong to this category. . . . I do not believe that ontological categories can do justice to the freedom either of the divine or the human person . . ." (*italics mine*).

For Niebuhr, human being can be grasped only in its historicity; more, the very substance of human being is its historicity. "The human person and man's society," Niebuhr says, "are by nature historical, and the ultimate truth about life must be mediated historically." To say that man has a history is not saying enough. In a real sense, man *is* a history, his "personal history," and the fullness of a person in his concrete and unique "personness" can be communicated only through his "biography"; the same is true of social groups, insofar as they are "organic" unities, not mere artifacts. This contrast between the ontological and the historical—the one rooted in the Greek-philosophical tradition, the other in the biblical-Hebraic dramatic imagination—is what at bottom distinguishes the thinking of Tillich and Niebuhr as they confront each other in the contemporary debate.

The implications of this fundamental confrontation go deep and far. There is, first, the question of human "personness." In Tillich's system, which is predicated on the continuity of being, human "personness" finds no special lodgment; it is merely the most developed form of the ontological feature of "individualization," which (along with its polar opposite, "participation") characterizes all being. "Selfhood," Tillich insists, "must be attributed in some measure to all living beings, and in terms of analogy to all individual *Gestalten*, even in the inorganic realm." Niebuhr, on the other hand, stresses the uniqueness of man's "personness," for his "personness" is his historicity, and his historicity is the outcome of the freedom which is uniquely human. He agrees with Kierkegaard that man's "eternal dignity is that he can have a

history." To have a history is to be a self; to be a self is to have a history.

They differ, too, in their interpretations of history, with which both are deeply concerned. Both see the temporal in relation to the eternal, but in very different ways. Tillich interprets history primarily in terms of its openness to the power of being. In history, the creative power of being is generally perverted and obscured by the autonomous or heteronomous structures which man erects as the assertion of his self-sufficiency or as the means of his self-engulfment. But there are periods of history that are *theonomous*, in which the power of being comes through unobstructedly and fills the historical moment. Such periods are periods of *kairos*, of "fulfilled time." The supreme *kairos* is, of course, the *kairos* represented in Jesus as the Christ; but—and this is Tillich's emphasis—there are derivative *kairoi* of history in which new historical structures of being emerge filled with divine power. "What happened in the one unique *kairos*, the appearance of Jesus as the Christ," Tillich explains, "may happen in a derived form again and again in the process of time. . . ." History opens up to the undistorted power of being, that is, to the divine.

It is precisely here that Niebuhr demurs. Niebuhr is deeply suspicious of the theonomous claims of any historical system, structure, or period. It is true, "the *agape* of the kingdom of God [emergent in the unique *kairos* of Jesus the Christ] is a resource for infinite development within history," but it is not uniquely or undistortedly present in any historical situation. All history remains ambiguous to the very end, caught in the ever-changing configurations of power and interest.

Niebuhr's historical relativism, as against Tillich's inclination to find *kairoi* in history, leads to profound differences in social philosophy. Tillich developed his *kairos* teaching in the years following the First World War in connection with the religious-socialist movement. Religious socialism, in the Germany between the wars, had a very special meaning; it meant a kind of total philosophy grounded in the conviction that the "appointed time" (*kairos*) was approaching for the reconstruction of both religion and the social order into a new theonomous structure in which religion and socialism would be united as form and content of the new age, replacing the autonomous-heteronomous decadence of bourgeois society. The new age that dawned in central Europe was rather different from what had been expected, and Tillich very

soon came to see the time as a "situation of the void" rather than as a "period of *kairos*," but he has never abandoned his religious-socialist position, which he seems to regard as in some sense final ("If the prophetic message is true, there is nothing 'beyond religious socialism' "). Some even of his most friendly critics would insist that for all his shedding of illusions, Tillich remains a utopian.

Niebuhr, on the other hand, was never a utopian, even when he was a "Marxist." The errors of his "Marxism" were the errors of a too simple social analysis of power and interest. Niebuhr never linked his social thinking to any particular *kairos*, nor did he envisage his program in the comprehensive and total terms of Tillich's religious socialism. The collapse of socialism, therefore, did not diminish the relevance of his theology to politics and history. Indeed, his theology seems to have become most influential in Protestant social thinking precisely in the course of the past decade.

Though I have been trying to avoid detailed doctrinal analysis in favor of a comparison of fundamental outlooks, we must pause a moment to consider what Tillich and Niebuhr have to say on love, sin, and redemption, for these are not just particular doctrines; rather are they major indications of one's ontologico-theological orientation.

For both thinkers, love is a central category. In Tillich, however, love is a "drive toward the unity of the separated," ultimately a drive toward union with Being-Itself (God), generated out of the ontological incompleteness of all finite being. Niebuhr, on the other hand, insists that "Christian faith does *not* derive the idea of love from the idea of being"; love, in his view, is a personal commitment of the self in an I-Thou relation, which, while ultimately grounded in the "very structure of human selfhood" (selfhood, not being), is a consummate expression of the indeterminate freedom of the human spirit. Again, to Tillich, sin is "separation," the separation of the human being from Being-Itself that comes when man leaves his potentiality in the divine ground to assume actuality in existence; sin thus becomes equivalent to, or at least coeval with, the emergence of finite being in creation. To Niebuhr, it is emphatically not finitude that is sin, but man's anxious effort to *deny* his finitude and to "infinitize" himself by the perverse use of his freedom in pride or sensuality. For Tillich, the "new man" in Christ is primarily an ontological renewal of being (the "new being"); for Niebuhr, it means a radical change of personal relation

between man and God, in which God "justifies" with his forgiveness and new gift of power the man who comes to him with "a broken heart and a contrite spirit."

On the highest level, the difference between the two theologians is a difference in the very conception of God. God, to Tillich, is Being-Itself (according to Tillich, this equivalence expresses the only non-symbolic statement that can be made about God); Tillich therefore speaks of a "God above God" and of an "absolute faith" which "transcends both the mystical experience and the divine-human encounter," and criticizes the "theism" of the divine-human encounter as "one-sided." Niebuhr, on the other hand, insists that the divine-human encounter, the I-Thou relation between man and God, is of the very texture of Christian faith ("the encounter with God is dramatic"); to attempt to transcend it is to lapse into a kind of supermysticism, in which the personality of man, as well as God, is endangered. The God beyond the divine-human encounter, Niebuhr feels, may well be Being-Itself, as Tillich says; but he does not recognize in this God the biblical God, the God of Christian faith, the God of whom the Reformation spoke. Niebuhr's stand for the biblical God of the divine-human encounter is thus, at the same time, he is convinced, a stand for the reality of the self and its history, which Tillich's ontological God ("Abyss of Being") seems forever threatening to swallow up.

I imagine that, by this time, it has become evident that behind all the contrasts I have been drawing, important as they are in themselves, there is a unifying background factor that can only be described as intellectual temperament. Tillich's passion is essentially the idealist's passion for unity and identity: separation, distinction, "over-against-ness," is somehow "wrong." Niebuhr, on the other hand, almost revels in plurality and diversity, the tension of "over-against-ness" being the primary dynamic of his thinking. In somewhat more academic terms, Tillich's dialectic is a "conjunctive" dialectic in which diversity is seen as forever being taken up in a larger unity; Niebuhr's dialectic is a "disjunctive" dialectic in which unity is seen as forever giving way to the interplay of diversity. For Tillich, it is synthesis, for Niebuhr it is dialogue, that constitutes the ultimate term of dialectic.

Since Tillich first came to this country in 1933, and did not begin writing in English until some time later, it is but natural that his impact on American thought should only have begun to make itself

felt at a time when Niebuhr was already at the height of his influence. Yet in the past decade or so, Tillich has more than made up for his late start. Today, he stands with Niebuhr as easily one of the two best known and most influential men in Protestant theology in America.

Particularly significant for our purposes is the direction and character of Tillich's impact as distinguished from Niebuhr's. They are both, Niebuhr and Tillich alike, theologians of culture, with a strong appeal to the nontheological, in many cases even nonreligious, intellectual. Yet their appeals are different. Niebuhr speaks to the concerns of the historian, the political scientist, the student of international affairs; his latest book [1] is one on the historical problems of empire, nation, and community. Tillich is at work on his Systematics, but his more popular writings, as well as his lecturing, appeal to those interested in art, depth psychology, and philosophy. It is not hard to see why this should be so. Art, insofar as it has shown any intellectual concern, has always sought for ontological understanding; and depth psychology today, having discovered the painful inadequacy of Freud's naturalistic metaphysic, is in search of some grounding in the ontological structures of being.[2] Niebuhr, on the other hand, with his historical understanding of human existence, obviously has something particularly relevant to say to those whose studies arise out of the historicity of man and his society. Yet it seems to me that something more is involved in Tillich's current appeal. There is a strong tendency in the United States, and (so far as I can judge) in other Western countries, for the more sensitive people to turn away from public and outward things to the inward and the private; it is a natural and, to a degree, wholesome, reaction against the delusive externalism of an earlier generation and a defense against the depersonalizing pressures of social life in a mass society. It can hardly be doubted that Tillich's new orientation in the "situation of the void"—retaining the vision of religious socialism as an "ideal," but without any of the old sense of

(*Continued on page 36*)

[1] *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959).

[2] Cf. Rollo May, Ernest Angell, and Henri F. Ellenberger, eds., *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1958).

CARL MICHALSON

Existentialism in Theology Today

EXISTENTIALISM is one of the ranking philosophies in the world today. For Christian theology that seems to have only two possible consequences: fight it, or join it. The alternative is not new to the history of the faith. At every stage of its intellectual development Christianity has alternately braced itself against or allowed itself to be seduced by the most commanding views of life developed outside the church. What shape is existentialism now conferring upon the Christian faith in its formulation?

I

To understand how existentialism affects Christian thinking, one should first understand what existentialism is. Inasmuch as the subject has been pretty thoroughly plowed up in recent years, I should like to structure my approach to it with the help of one of the lesser-known existentialists, the Irish playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett, whose most familiar work is probably *Waiting for Godot.*

Three brief dialogues in his play *Endgame* seem to me to set up the main dialectic in the existential position. No work of Beckett's makes any sense as a whole. The strategy of fragmentation and open-endedness is calculated; for, according to existentialism, *life* does not make sense as a whole either. However, brief episodes of illumination such as the three I have chosen jut through the more massive unreasonableness of the Beckett literature. The reader then becomes satisfied that the oracular utterances justify the incomprehensible remainder as sheer ad-libbing until such time as the significant statement can be spoken.

(*a*)

HAMM: Last night I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore.

CLOV: Pah! You saw your heart.

HAMM: No, it was living.
(*Pause. Anguished.*)

(*Endgame,* Evergreen, p. 32)

St. Augustine once described existence in a similar way. It is a dying life and a living death. "To decompose is to live, too" (Beckett, *Molloy*, Evergreen, p. 33). Man is a being who is irremediably mortal. What is meant by mortality is not the mere biological event of physical extinction. Some disease begins to eat away our hearts from the outset. Existentialism diagnoses the fatal disease as absurdity. Life is unreasonable. That is, there is no apparent reason for living. Therefore, Albert Camus, the Algerian-Parisian novelist, opened his early essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* with the line, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide." When the heart is dead the next step in the logic of life is suicide. The strange exhilaration of that act seems to be that it is the only sensible act in life. While no other existentialists take quite this position on suicide, their immediate analysis of existence is the same. Existence is absurd because it is an unresolvable conflict between the desire for eternity and the inevitability of death. It is the passion for meaning in a world that is taciturn and opaque. To some, it may seem strange that on the basis of such analyses Camus was awarded a Nobel prize for "illuminating the problems of the human conscience in our time." The noteworthy thing about the award is its discernment regarding "the problems of the human conscience." The ethical problem of existence today, according to existentialism, is not determining what is good and bad or what is true and false but finding a reason for living.

Man, as Heidegger says, is a being who is thrown into the world. He is impacted here, as marble in mud, with nothing around him that adequately explains him. But he is restless and malcontent until he transcends the sheer stupefaction of being here. Man is as one who awakens from a dream holding tightly to the side of his bed. He is not satisfied until he can remember what he dreamed that makes him hold on so. The frustration and thirst and fatigue of reaching out for meanings for which one's world provides no clues is the anguish of the existing man. I believe it is possible to see this illustrated in Henri Rousseau's painting *The Sleeping Gypsy*. You may recall the scene, in which a gypsy is lying on a vast stretch of beach with a moon above

and a lion and a lyre at his side. The noteworthy thing about the picture (if one interprets it existentially rather than by the canons of Zen Buddhism) is that there are no footprints on the sand, as if the gypsy had simply been thrown there. When he awakens and attempts to give direction to the wayfarer in his soul, there will be no clue around him to tell him where he has come from and where he shall go. Existentialism is the philosophical cry of a man lost in his world. Camus has expressed this in one of his stories with particular starkness. Like a scene from the Apocalypse, the stage bristles with questions about the destiny of mankind. Then into the scene there hobbles an old man who simply stands there, silent.

(*b*)

HAMM: What is he doing?
CLOV: He's crying.
HAMM: Then he's living.

(*Endgame*, p. 62)

One would be wrong to conclude from the foregoing discussion that existentialism is a philosophy of despair. It simply *begins* in despair, as Platonism began in wonder and Cartesianism in doubt. But despair is no final resting place any more than wonder or doubt were for philosophies in the past. The philosophical importance of existentialism is that in a world in which nothing seems certainly knowable one senses a panic in his inner life which at least communicates the awareness of one's own existence. That experience leads to an important epistemological point of departure. The hope for knowledge will be closely related to what I know about myself, in my concrete encounter with life as I come up against it. The existentialist, therefore, driven by the sting of an apparently meaningless life, consults the sting itself as a source of meaning.

The philosophical importance of this is that the existentialist looks for truth where it appears, and not behind or beyond appearances. It is a philosophy that seeks answers to the questions about the meaning of existence from within the conditions of life where one is placed. The very resistances, the very silences, the very limits, are consulted for whatever evidence they can yield. Karl Jaspers, the German existentialist teaching in Basel alongside Karl Barth, refers to these situations as

boundary situations: suffering, death, guilt, the struggle for love, and the struggle for power. Life may have no apparently ultimate meaning, but man is a being who is engaged in enterprises that constantly draw on the necessity for meaningful decision. Is there no clue to reality in this lively sense of one's own presence to himself, which one experiences when the conditions of life are crucial?

Gabriel Marcel, the French Catholic existentialist, defines man's life as essentially incarnational. By that he means one's existence is always incorporated, always inseparable from a body, always located in time and space. To the more idealistic philosophies of the past, this was considered a limitation upon the appropriation of truth. Marcel turns the necessity into a virtue: one can use his immediate, corporeal contacts with life as clues to the shape of life. As Beckett says in *The Unnamable*, "I know my eyes are open because of the tears that pour from them unceasingly. I know I am seated, my hands on my knees, because of the pressure against my rump, against the soles of my feet." (Evergreen, p. 22.) Beckett originally learned this from Marcel Proust, whom he quotes as saying, "Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows others only in himself, and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies" (*Proust*, Evergreen, p. 49). Truth is never apprehended *in abstracto*, which is Latin for "outside one's own skin."

That is why existentialism must not be written off as an irrationalism. Irrationalism is the effort to live by confused reasons. Existentialism is an effort to find lucid reasons at the boundary of existence. Heidegger finds such lucidity in one fundamental question: If life is ultimately meaningless, "why am I something and not nothing?" Camus finds it in the dynamics of the myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus is condemned ceaselessly to roll a stone up a steep hill. He knows in advance that at each attempt the stone will roll back before he makes the grade. Yet Sisyphus continues to roll that stone. Why? That is a picture of man's absurd bargain with life. Beckett enumerates a few "hopes" which Sisyphus might enjoy notwithstanding his sentence: he can stop occasionally to scratch himself, take a different route each time, or be the kind of person who is filled with satisfaction at "doing the same thing endlessly over and over again." But this kind of hope is at best a "hellish hope," unrelieved by the promise of something ultimately gratifying (*Molloy*, p. 182).

(*c*)

CLOV: Do you believe in the life to come?

HAMM: Mine was always that.

(*Exit Clov.*)

(*Endgame,* p. 49)

The most authentic existentialisms are the ones that hold the question of meaning open to the future, refusing to gratify their questions with artificial, sporadic answers. In one sense, these positions seem the most pathetic, like small boys who will not eat bread if they cannot have cake. In another sense, they seem to betray the initial motive of existentialism, which is revolt against a universe that does not reveal its own intent. Camus's later work seems to make a truce by settling for a form of mysticism with the world. It is a virtual abandonment of the quest for ultimate meaning for the sake of momentary meanings, as a man who cannot marry settles for the intermittent pleasures of promiscuity. Jaspers turns his negative answers regarding a meaningful life into positive clues: the dark clouds of existence could have a silver lining of meaning. That is possible. Marcel, of course, turns to Roman Catholicism, and it is often difficult to distinguish between his revealed theology and his philosophy.

The early Heidegger and Sartre, like Beckett, of all the existentialists, seem to play the game to the end. If there is meaning, as our inexplicable appetite for it suggests, then it must be in the future. The information existence yields up to Beckett, for instance, is not enough to tell him whether he is being born or whether he is dying or even who he really is. Therefore, we must wait, condemning all momentary claims to meaning which bid for our loyalty at insignificant levels. Sartre's philosophy, most rigorous of all in this regard, is a deliberate strategy of annihilating every block to man's openness to the future. Even death itself, which is the final testimony to a meaningless life, is repudiated by Sartre on the grounds that it compromises one's freedom for the future. That is why Sartre disagrees with Camus concerning suicide. An act of suicide for Sartre would be an effort to find meaning on a basis that is, absurdly, the termination of the hope for meaning. Thus what seductively appears as the one meaningful act is really the end of the possibility of meaning. If there is no real life in the present, man has only one hope left him, an eschatological hope. Thus the

authentic existentialist is the one for whom the future is the primary historical category because it is the sole remaining possibility of salvaging existence. For existentialism, as for Seymour in Salinger's recent story, of all the words in the Bible, the favorite is "Watch!"

II

The eschatological suggestiveness of existentialism is the point at which it is most influential in Christian theology today. Camus once referred to the novels of Franz Kafka as "theology in action" because of the way they stripped all the artificial props away from life and left man exposed to some more eternal possibility. Existential philosophy is, in this sense, a secularized theology. Unlike almost every other philosophy, while it asks the question about ultimate meaning, it holds itself open to an answer it cannot itself provide.

The instance of the use of existentialism in theology today that is apt to occur to Americans first is Paul Tillich's method of correlation. Here the answers of the Christian faith are used by Tillich to fill the existential void. Now that there has been time to assimilate Tillich's position, it is being deceptively felt that his tactic is a very simple procedure which almost any Lutheran pastor would have used who desired to relate the faith apologetically. Therefore one should go beneath the apparently simple correlation of question and answer to a profounder level in Tillich's method. When one does, however, one senses another difficulty. His correlation is not a simple fitting of answers to questions but an ontology of question and answer in which the very asking of the question of ultimate meaning is already in some sense a participation in ultimately meaningful being. On that basis Tillich can regard the most violent, fragmented forms of contemporary art as the best expressions of the Protestant spirit, and he can be more hospitable than most theologians are to the meanings in non-Christian faiths and in philosophies.

Ontology for Tillich absorbs history and in doing so forecloses on the future. Tillich does not play the game to the end. Avowedly, he is not a radical existentialist. No one has made it clearer than Tillich himself that when one becomes a Christian he ceases being an existentialist. What is rarely realized is that Tillich himself ceases being an existentialist *before* he becomes a Christian. Martin Heidegger led the way for this, especially in his later works when he augmented his radical

sense of the questionableness of life by the awareness of a revelation of meaning in the very question. His existentialism thus gave way to a more classical form of ontological philosophy. This position is expressed in Tillich's systematic theology where a philosophy of being becomes the common foundation beneath an otherwise radical existence and radical faith. Theologically, that means faith is never one's radical end: the revelation of meaning was already implicit in the fact of being. Philosophically, that means Tillich is among those associated with existentialism who do not play the game to the end.

The most influential existential view in theology today is the method of biblical exegesis that Rudolf Bultmann sponsors. Irrespective of how his biblical colleagues react to him, the distinctive characteristic of his view philosophically and theologically is that he is one who does play the game to the end. He holds the same radically unanswerable existential questions that the existentialists and Tillich hear, but he knows of no possibility outside the Christian revelation for answering these questions. Of course, he is professionally unqualified, as any theologian is, to deny such possibilities. However, in his exegesis of the New Testament faith it becomes clear to him that the event of God in human history under the name of Jesus of Nazareth is "an eschatological event." That means that a Christian, who bases his existence on God's act in Christ, sees history as a reality to which God himself puts an end. The Christian, then, supplies the reason behind the existentialist's inability to find ultimate meaning in history. According to the Christian faith, history in general lacks the means of overcoming its own deficiencies because God is Lord of history. At one point only is the predicament of history overcome; that is the holy event of Jesus in which God reveals his lordship once and for all. All history is called to the decision about its ultimate hopefulness in that event.

Does not such a radical revelationalism remove Bultmann a great distance from all philosophy, and from existentialism in particular? Yes, and the two people who have seen this most clearly about Bultmann are Karl Jaspers and Karl Barth, although for somewhat different reasons. Jaspers rejects Bultmann because in making one historical event the absolute for all history he has shown himself to be too orthodox a Christian. Barth, on the other hand, defends Bultmann against the charge that he has made Christian faith synonymous with existential philosophy. "There are some philosophical fragments float-

ing in all theological soup," Barth has said; and existentialism is no more definitive of Bultmann's theology than garnishing is to the soup.

The main struggle brewing in theological circles in America today is a struggle between Barthianism, which is just beginning to take hold, thanks to the English translations now appearing, and Bultmann's existential method of interpretation. Why should that be so when both have so much in common, as contrasted with Paul Tillich, in respect of their radical dependence upon the revealed character of the Christian faith? There are two central issues between them, and both depend upon an appreciation of how existentialism can be used in theology without compromising the radicalism of either existentialism or the Christian revelation.

First is the issue as to how to interpret the Bible. According to Barth, it is the task of theology to criticize the preaching of the church in the light of the exegesis of the Scriptures. Bultmann's quarrel with Barth, however, is that Barth has no method of criticizing the Scriptures themselves. Now, both agree in rejecting the older tactics of biblical criticism which approached the Bible simply as literature, with no sense of its normative value for Christian faith. How, then, does Bultmann's biblical criticism differ from that of another day?

This is where his existentialism serves his interpretive task. The Bible is asking a certain type of question. These questions are strikingly similar to the questions existential philosophers are asking: "Why am I something and not nothing?" "What must I do to be saved?" or, as Beckett puts it, "That rumour rising at birth and even earlier, What shall I do? What shall I do?" (*Molloy*, p. 11.) Existential philosophy is helpful in formulating theological questions but is in no sense necessary to theology. For the Bible both asks and answers these questions. Only a man who comes to the Bible asking the questions the Bible is asking will understand it. One cannot read a book meaningfully unless he asks it the questions it is attempting to answer.

However, Bultmann detects that the Bible is also answering some questions which it is not asking and which the seriously existing man does not ask, either. They are answers rooted in curiosity and the instinct for evidential certainty and speculative explanation which do not speak in a primary way to the final concerns of life. Such answers participate in a myth-making tendency manifest in all religions, which is the tendency to express the truth of the eternal as if it were as verifiable

as the facts of the world. It is one of the responsibilities of the biblical interpreter to criticize these elements in the biblical literature for the sake of allowing the truth of the faith to emerge. The Bible can in this way be criticized without jeopardy to its status as rule of faith inasmuch as the standard for judging it is itself a biblical standard. That is, when the Bible is found to be answering questions that the Bible is not itself asking, there is a standard from within the Bible itself for judging the Bible.

The second issue between Barth and Bultmann has to do with what is meant by the historical character of Christian truth. Both affirm that Christian truth has to do with an event in history. Barth has persistently defined the event primarily from the standpoint of the doctrine of the Trinity, that is, from the standpoint of God's participation in the event. The tendency of Bultmann and his followers has been to define the event more largely than Barth from the standpoint of man's participation in it. The difference is at the point of inflection, and the inflections show up the relative esteem for existential matters. For Barth, revelation is not true unless it is *theologically* meaningful, that is, unless it involves God himself. For Bultmann, revelation is not true unless it is theologically *meaningful*, that is, unless it involves man himself.

The outcome of Bultmann's method is a theology of existential interpretation in which the revealed events to which the faith witnesses are translated into the basis for a meaningful existence. The position is more familiar to Americans than often suspected, thanks to the pioneering which the Niebuhr brothers have done in our midst in the same vein. A highly sophisticated manifestation of the method can be found in the works of the Göttingen theologian Friedrich Gogarten, who has been at the center of the Continental theological dialogue since the early twenties. Interesting and somewhat creative new departures are occurring in Europe in the generation of Bultmann's and Gogarten's disciples, particularly Gerhard Ebeling of Zurich and Ernst Fuchs of Berlin.

In a theology of existential interpretation, theological propositions are not intended as statements of truth but as access to the illumination of existence. For instance, statements about God as creator are not so much literal truths about God as they are invitations to man to assume his role as creature. Statements about creation are not meant to compete with or much less to corroborate the findings of natural science

but to give man the confidence that there is a purpose in history, however hidden. Statements about eschatology do not point to something in a chronological timeline of world history but support man's history with the realization that the hopes of history are not historically realizable and that he receives his life from beyond himself. The statement that children should honor their parents is a true statement only when uttered by a child. The importance of this trend for an understanding of Christian truth is enormous. When a man comes up against a hot stove he may conclude, "The stove is hot," or even, "Hot stoves burn." But he does not have the truth about the stove until he concludes, "I will be cautious in its presence."

This method of thinking is being undermined today from two sides. One is the old, familiar Barthian complaint that existential interpretation reduces theology to anthropology. But Barth himself has softened that complaint in his later works, where a new appreciation of the pietist tradition and the "humanity of God" has become quite evident. The more serious erosion is from the side of the friends of the method who carry it too far and thus appear to substantiate the Barthian objection. Fritz Buri of Basel is the chief illustration of this direction. Buri finds that the meaningful statements of the Christian faith are symbols which are not necessary derivatives of Christian revelation. They may as well be symbols of existence alone, and they may function valuably even though independently of any special divine act in history. Wilhelm Kamlah, a German theologian turned philosopher, contends somewhat more bluntly that existential philosophy has everything the Christian faith offers, so why be a Christian theologian?

Other followers of the line of existential hermeneutic, sensing this erosion of the Christian foundation of their faith at the hands of existentialism, have leaned way to the right to become Roman Catholics. I refer principally to Heinrich Schlier, New Testament professor at the University of Bonn in Germany, and Gerhard Krüger, professor of philosophy at the University of Frankfort.

The irony of this latter movement is in the way in which Roman Catholics themselves are increasingly turning to existentialism. These are the new modernists, such as Jean Danielou and Henri de Lubac in France and Karl Rahner in Austria, who have been the object of a papal rebuke in the recent encyclical, *Humani generis*. The rebuke, however, was so gently and appreciatively made that in some circles it is

interpreted as encouragement. The force of the existential concern in Roman Catholicism is twofold. It is giving the Catholic faith a point of contact with modern times which no longer seems available in the categories of Scholasticism. And it is reopening Catholic interest in the Bible, which the creeds and the developing tradition of the church had been allowed to overshadow. Existentialism could do this for Roman Catholicism because it made the Christian aware of a kind of redemptive concern within the Bible which was not adequately represented in the more speculative and theologically defensive formulations of the ecumenical councils.

At least one question remains poised over this discussion. The genuine existentialists are those who play the game to the end. They are the witnesses to the absence of final meaning in history and to the unreasonableness of that condition. The theologies cited claim some kinship if not indebtedness to existentialism. Yet, in proposing Christ as the presence of ultimacy in history, have they not also failed to play the game to the end? That, of course, will depend on how one interprets "Christ's Parthian shaft, 'It is finished'" (Beckett, *Murphy*, Evergreen, p. 72).

WILLIAM E. HORDERN

Karl Barth: The Preacher's Theologian

IN 1919 an unknown Swiss pastor brought about a theological revolution by writing a commentary on the book of Romans. This pastor, Karl Barth, immediately became the center of controversy. Few theologians have aroused such passionate devotion or such fierce antagonism.

While European and Asiatic Christians have been absorbing the Barthian insights, Americans have remained strangely unaware of Barth's thinking. The result has been an unbelievable misunderstanding of Barth in this country. The author of the commentary on Romans was a young man of thirty-three; he wrote with passion, overstatement, and in reaction to many of the main currents of modern theology. Since that book appeared Barth's thinking has matured and developed. And yet in this country you seldom hear Barth discussed without having him annihilated because of some injudicious passage from his *Romans*, as though the mature Barth of today had remained intellectually with the bold young man of forty years ago.

When Otto Weber's digest of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* was translated into English, Barth, in a foreword, summarized many of the misconceptions of his thought that are held in America. For example, he noted that Americans believe that he preaches a "wholly other" God, that he makes ethics impossible, that he calls for otherworldly biblicism and quietism—in short, that he is neo-orthodox "with a faint flavor of nihilism." Appropriately Barth asks of this, "Should I weep or laugh?" He further states that he sees no reason why people have to read his work, but he would suppose that if they were going to talk about him, they would at least do him the justice of reading what he has to say.

There have been serious problems about reading Barth. The volumes of his *Church Dogmatics* fill a library shelf and, until recently, have been

available only in German. Today, however, Charles Scribner's Sons is publishing this significant work in English. We still have a problem in paying for these large volumes and in finding the time to read them, but I know of no works where we can get more theological meat for our time or money. Every minister owes it to himself to read at least Volumes I, 1 and I, 2, in which he will get a thorough introduction to Barth's thought. Furthermore, in volumes such as II, 2, the preacher will find extensive passages of biblical exegesis that are overflowing with sermonic material. Of course, this is not for the lazy parson who wants to find his sermon ready-made for him, but it is definitely for the preacher who is prepared to work creatively. Fortunately, Barth has written some good shorter introductions to his thought, such as *The Faith of the Church* (Living Age Books), *Christ and Adam* (Harper), and *Dogmatics in Outline* (Harper Torch Books). The reader must keep in mind that in these shorter works he finds conclusions given in a page that have been established through a hundred pages of careful argument in the *Church Dogmatics,* so that in the shorter form they do not carry the same persuasion.

Barth is a quiet, gentle, and scholarly person. He lives simply and unostentatiously. His first love is working through theological problems in a small seminar of concerned students. And yet this gentle scholar has a notorious reputation for his scathing attacks upon his adversaries. This anomaly is easily explained. If you attack Barth you will quickly see the other cheek turned; in fact, Barth will provide you with ammunition that you have overlooked. Thus when Reinhold Niebuhr frequently attacks Barth for his political judgments, Barth remains silent. But if Barth feels that you are tampering with the gospel of God revealed in Christ, then you had better flee for the nearest cyclone cellar. Emil Brunner has not yet recovered from the blast that Barth fired at him in his famous *Nein, Nein, Emil Brunner* when Barth thought Brunner guilty of selling out the gospel for a mess of natural-theology pottage. The American also needs to recall that European scholars use a stronger language in their debates than Americans would use. For example, when Karl Jaspers wrote a critique of Bultmann's position, he spoke about Bultmann in a way that would have been a scandal in this country.

It is significant that Barth never wanted to be a theologian and for a long time he insisted that he was only writing a marginal note to

theology, tossing in a "pinch of cinnamon" to sharpen it. The length and systematic nature of his work make such descriptions of it humorous today, but it was not Barth's intention to write a system. Barth began as a preacher, and he has never lost the conviction that this is his real vocation. The Barthian theological revolution began when Barth was a young country pastor, agonizing over how he could speak each Sunday to the faithful people who came to hear him. When he looked to the theologians of his day, he found that they failed him. They had taken the task of the preacher in a most casual and leisurely fashion. Barth was convinced that the only excuse for the existence of a theologian was to be at one and the same time the critic and the servant of the preacher. Theology must begin and end with the sermon.

The American preacher is likely to complain that he cannot preach the complexities of Barth's thought to the typical congregation. But the preacher is meant to be an interpreter who carries what he has learned in theology to the man in the pew. Barth writes for the preacher, not the layman; but he writes ever mindful that the task of the preacher is to speak to the layman. When Barth was criticized that his commentary on Romans was too complex, he replied quite rightly that Romans itself was not so simple and neither is the present situation of man. The American protest against the complexities of theology is often a reflection of our tendency to look for simple do-it-yourself gimmicks to solve the problems of man. Barth has resisted the temptation to oversimplify. His journey from the pulpit back to the pulpit has been an arduous one, but it remains a serious question whether the pulpit can ever be effective in the sight of God if it refuses to take such a journey.

Barth, as a bewildered preacher, faced the problem of relating the problems of life to the "strange new world" of the Bible. He became convinced that this cannot be done until we come to know that strange new world. And so Barth turned to the book of Romans and listened to see if God would not speak to him through it. When he did so, as A. M. Hunter has put it, he found that this letter written two thousand years ago had become a special-delivery letter to the twentieth century. It has remained Barth's firm conviction that when we take the Bible seriously we find it a means whereby God speaks to us today.

There have been many changes in Barth's theological position since he first spoke. This is why it is unfair to quote his earlier works as if they represented Barth today. Barth can change because he is convinced

that theology is a human enterprise; we offer our thinking to God, ever aware that it is finite and subject to error. No theological system can claim finality. But through his many changes, one basic conviction has remained firm. It is the river bed through which Barth's growing thought has flowed. That conviction is that God has taken the initiative and acted to make himself known to man through his gracious acts proclaimed by the Bible. For a century German theologians had worked to find a way from man to God. Some followed religious experience with Schleiermacher; others followed ethics with Kant, or the history of religions, or rational metaphysics. Barth denied that we can find a way from man to God, a tower of Babel to heaven.

Whatever road man took to find God would lead, Barth believed, to idolatry. Barth took seriously the point of men like Feuerbach and Freud that religion is wish fulfillment, man's building God in his own image to fit his own needs. If we are to escape wish fulfillment, we must let God tell us who he is. Instead of concocting the gods we should like to have, we must listen to the God who is as he speaks to us.

But God has spoken his Word to make himself and his will known to man. And because God has spoken, man must try to understand. Theology is thus a rational action in service to God. Barth has a very high view of reason; he deplores the idea that rational thinking is somehow a less religious act than praying or singing hymns or having religious experience. If God has spoken a word to man, it is disobedience not to ask ourselves what God has said to us. The love and mercy of God is displayed in the fact that he speaks to us in order that we may understand and know him.

At this point we will hear objections from those who know only the stereotype of Barth. "Isn't Barth an irrationalist who destroys all reason for the sake of faith?" It is amazing how this idea has persisted. Certain injudicious passages by Barth in *Romans* are partially to blame. But the real problem is, What do you mean by rational? I have grown suspicious of people who call others irrational. Almost always this charge hides the worst form of dogmatism. In effect it claims that if you do not come to the same conclusions as the speaker, it is because you are not rational.

It is important to see what is at stake here. Barth is called irrational because he denies natural theology; that is, he denies that man can start reasoning about his universe and build a line of thought independent of

any revelation that will persuade all rational men of certain truths about God. But we should make it clear that this does not mean that Barth irrationally accepts the Christian faith without evidence and calls us to do the same. Barth's point, still missed by many, is that the Christian faith does not need, in fact is corrupted by, alien evidence. It has its own evidence. The Word of God in Christ comes to us with its own persuasive power.

We may decide that Barth's attempt to find the evidence for Christianity within Christianity itself and not in philosophical speculation is false, but it cannot be dismissed as irrational or unimportant. We can see how important it is for Christianity today when we recall what has been happening in modern philosophy. In Europe the main currents of philosophy are existentialist; in the Anglo-Saxon countries they are primarily language analysis. At first sight the existentialists and the analytic philosophers do not appear to have anything in common, but on one point they agree. They reject the traditional metaphysical pursuits of philosophy as impossible and undesirable. With metaphysics, of course, all forms of natural theology are thrown out. The Christian who has tried to build a philosophical road to God finds today that the best minds in philosophy are unpersuaded by his case. This means that the Christian who would use natural theology to lay a basis for the Christian faith is in a precarious position. As Barth points out, such an approach runs the continual danger that if the argument fails, the unbeliever may think that in refuting the natural theologian's argument he has disposed of Christianity. In a day when most philosophical minds are convinced that the natural theologian's arguments are invalid, there is the real danger that men will feel that Christianity has been disproved. But, as Barth would insist, in such a case Christianity has not been given a hearing.

One of the problems in understanding Barth is that we have so watered down the concept of faith that when Barth tells us that Christianity depends upon faith, we believe that he is irrational. If Barth meant, as we so often mean, that faith implies believing something for which we have inadequate evidence, then it would be a flight from reason to build on faith. But Barth means by faith what the great thinkers of Christianity always have meant, "Faith is the evidence." Faith, that is, is itself a way of knowing and as such is the foundation for rational thought, not the flight from it.

In one sense, it is not wrong to define faith as that which is held without evidence. The difficulty is that in a rational argument there are two ways in which we may hold something without evidence. We may have a conclusion for which we have failed to establish the adequate grounds of evidence. But in any rational argument there is always another element held without evidence and that is the evidence itself. No evidence can be given for it for the simple reason that it is itself the best possible evidence. It is becoming increasingly apparent in philosophical circles that the real point where men divide in their thinking is the question as to what constitutes evidence and what does not. We can never prove that evidence is evidence by any form of reason; the evidence has to prove itself. When Barth denies that we can reason another man into Christianity, what he is saying is that Christianity rests upon its own evidence and the evidence must prove itself. This means that our task is to present God in Christ to our hearers in the confident faith that the Holy Spirit has the power to convince the hearer of our truth claims. This puts a challenge to the Christian. If we really believe that our faith is true, ought we not to have confidence that God in Christ is his own best evidence and depend upon God instead of turning to the dubious help of the natural theologian?

Another widely held opinion about Barth is that his theology destroys all basis for social concern and social action. I was interested a few weeks ago to hear a European Christian leader affirm that Barth was the one above all others who had forced the European churches to face their social responsibility. When an American student questioned this by saying that in this country we thought that Barth undermined all social concern, the European looked bewildered. He could only answer, "You must be referring to someone other than Barth." Those who are most familiar with Barth's theology cannot understand this criticism; it misses its mark completely. Not even the most ardent follower of Barth would argue that Barth's political statements always have been the wisest, but then theologians generally are not noted for political acumen. But it cannot be claimed that Barth has no basis for social action. Throughout, Barth has insisted that the Christian must obey God in the whole of his life, and that means serving God through society and its institutions as well as through the church.

Barth claims that, when taken seriously, the Christian faith leads a man to the service of God. Dogmatics, he tells us, must become ethics,

and thus he includes Christian ethics within his systematic theology. But the service that God demands of us is precisely the service of our neighbor. When Christ lived, died, and rose again, he redeemed the whole world; evil was defeated decisively. We must not suppose that Christ's death matters only for the chosen few; it was for all. The Christian, therefore, in applying his Christian concern for his neighbor through the state and society is simply witnessing to the victory that God won in Christ even for the neighbor who does not recognize it. There is not time here to develop Barth's theological basis for social action. But Charles C. West in his book *Communism and the Theologians* (Westminster Press), has done a masterful job of presenting Barth's thought. He argues that Barth has been more helpful than other theologians to those Christians who have to live within communist countries. West also makes the point that many who have been inspired by Barth's theology have been more perceptive in applying it to political affairs than has Barth himself.

But you say, Isn't Barth the arch pessimist? If we accept his system, do we not give up all hope for man and the world? This widely held view is the most ironical of all misconceptions of Barth. In fact, a good case can be made that optimism, not pessimism, is his weakness. We must never mention sin, he tells us, unless we immediately go on to emphasize that sin has been overcome in Christ. He so emphasizes the victory of Christ that many feel he fails to do justice to man's sin and misery. From an early time Barth was disturbed at his own disciples who seemed to feel that they had to debase man in order to exalt God. Barth repudiates this tendency, and in his doctrines of creation and redemption he emphasizes the dignity and value that God has bestowed upon man. Man's sin consists in his refusal to accept this divinely ordained dignity. When man turns his back upon God and tries to build his own dignity and worth, he falls. But God did not intend man to remain fallen, and the costly act of redemption in Christ was to restore man to the original dignity for which God intended him. You cannot read Barth without realizing that the gospel is good news.

When first Barth broke onto the theological scene, Americans ignored him as the theological expression of the decadent and discouraged European culture. Then as the world listened and learned form Barth, we patronized him. Yes, we agreed, Barth is a corrective. Theology had gone to one extreme, and Barth corrected it by going to the opposite

extreme. The implication, of course, was that we could be grateful to Barth but no one needs to take an extremist seriously. But now that we are getting the opportunity to read his *Church Dogmatics* in full, we must conclude that we face one of the theological giants of the ages.

Let us hope that the time of fierce antagonism toward Barth will pass and we may enter a period of critical appreciation. As I have tried to show, a great deal of the opposition to Barth has been obscurantist and unenlightened. It has attacked a purely mythical figure and has nothing to say about the true Barth. But we must not swing over to any unquestioning acceptance of Barth. Those who have unquestioningly accepted Barth have done more harm to his prestige and influence than his enemies. Barth is the first to emphasize that no theology, including his own, can ever be left above question. We must read Barth as critically as Barth has taught us to read the theology of others.

Barth is putting the finishing touches to a system that will inspire Christian thinkers through the centuries. Future historians might well argue that Christianity survived the critical twentieth century because of the work of Barth. But if so, Barth would be the first to tell them how wrong they would be. Christianity will survive, Barth affirms, not because of the work of any man or men. It will survive because in Jesus Christ God defeated decisively the forces of evil. Only because of what God has done can Christians like Barth continue to witness through the centuries.

JOHN MACQUARRIE

Demythologizing and the Gospel

AT THE end of World War II the writer of this article was serving as chaplain with the British army in North Africa. He was given an unusual and somewhat daunting assignment—that of organizing religious ordinances for the tens of thousands of German prisoners of war who were being held in camps in Egypt and the adjacent countries. About thirty German Protestant pastors from among the prisoners were available for the work, and they received every help from the British authorities. But they were facing an entirely missionary situation, and they had to begin literally from nothing. It was not just that they had to improvise churches and furnishings and the other accessories of worship in the dusty desert camps. It was rather that they were facing men who had come to the end of their tether, men who had begun to question everything. Many of these men had been brought up to believe fanatically in the pagan doctrines of National Socialism, but now they saw Hitler's empire laid in ruins and its idols fallen on the ground. Their own future was uncertain and unpromising. They were asking what meaning, if any, attaches to human existence. It was clear that no merely conventional message could get across to such men, but only one that was geared to their desperate needs, one that was—if we may use the current jargon—"existentially relevant." It says much for the faith and insight of the German pastors that their ministry in the prison camps met with a very remarkable response.

The situation just described may be taken as illustrating the situation that developed in Germany as a whole toward the end of the war. It is not surprising that in response to the needs of such a situation new theological formulations and new ways of presenting the Christian message should arise. It was out of war-torn Germany that Bultmann's "demythologizing" came, and in the postwar years it has exercised an

influence comparable to that of Barth's theology of crisis a generation earlier. We should remember this background of demythologizing, especially those of us who live in the relatively stable societies of Britain and America and have not known at first hand the violent upheavals that have been experienced on the continent of Europe.

Of course, a good many years have already elapsed since the grim days of war. They are being forgotten, and with them the elemental questions that are asked by men who have come to the end of their resources. Philosophers like Jaspers tell us that these questions are forgotten because we want to forget them. We do not want to be disturbed by the *real* questions of life. We want to live complacently and securely on the surface of things, occupying ourselves with sport and television and all the trappings and trimmings of modern life while trying to shut out the big, disquieting questions of what it is all about and where we are going. Yet surely it is also true that we live in an uneasy world and that these big questions are never far below the surface.

The kind of philosophy that occupies itself with these basic questions of human existence is existentialism, and perhaps Bultmann's demythologizing is best understood as a Christian existentialism. We should recognize that existentialism is not a philosophy in the old-fashioned sense of a body of doctrine, but rather a way of philosophizing in which the individual is called to know himself, to question his own being. We can see why this philosophy also received a stimulus from wartime conditions, because men are driven to ask the questions of existence when life is stripped of its external supports and exhibited in its elemental dimensions. Of course, many existentialists are not Christians. Especially in postwar France there has arisen a school of existentialists who are avowedly atheistic, and who tell us that there is no meaning in human existence except what man himself can put into it. But Bultmann has boldly appropriated the existentialist approach and even the existentialist terminology to find a way of expressing the Christian view of life such as will win a hearing in the contemporary world. Even atheistic existentialism is preoccupied with such mysteries of human life as guilt, responsibility, death, and because of this perhaps stands nearer to Christianity than much of the shallow secularism of our day which either evades such issues or else gives them a purely naturalistic interpretation.

Bultmann therefore believes that when we go to the Bible, the ques-

tions we must ask of it are the fundamental questions of our own existence. These are the questions men ask *in extremis*, but in this age of anxiety they are not very far below the surface in any one of us. Who am I? Whence do I come? Whither am I destined? How must I live? When we ask questions such as these, Bultmann thinks, we can elicit the authentic Christian message in a way that is highly relevant to the needs of men today. This message is to be interpreted existentially, as a way of understanding ourselves and the possibilities of our existence.

In his concrete working out of this approach to the Christian message, we find that Bultmann's thought moves around two basic ideas: "myth" and "kerygma."

The use of the word "myth" may surprise and even shock us. Is not a myth an untrue story? In recent years, however, we have come to appreciate more and more the nature of myth and its function in human life. The meaning of a myth does not lie on its surface but in what it tries to express, in the form of a story, of man's understanding of himself. Bultmann thinks that one of the main obstacles in the way of communicating the message of the Bible today lies in the fact that so much of that message is in mythical form, so that it is misunderstood and dismissed by the modern man. He fails to penetrate beneath the surface of the story to the self-understanding it is meant to convey, and so he finds in it nothing relevant to his existence. To demythologize, in Bultmann's sense of the word, is simply to translate the essential meaning of the story from its mythological form into language that explicitly refers to human existence.

Thus, if we take the creation stories from the beginning of the Old Testament, we misunderstand them if we regard them as speculations about the origins of the world and man. The modern man would dismiss them as outmoded and seek his information from the scientist. But if we think of these stories as expressing a self-understanding, they take on an almost startling relevance. Adam's creation signifies my creatureliness. The story answers the question, "Who am I?" It teaches me that my being is derivative and dependent—the religious self-understanding as opposed to the secular self-understanding in which man arrogates independence to himself and becomes the measure of all things.

This secular self-understanding is criticized in another old story—that of the builders of the tower of Babel. How do we understand that story if not as meaning that men who deify themselves, their prowess, and

their achievements, are headed for frustration and self-destruction? Again the story ceases to be a remote, unintelligible curiosity and takes on a pungent relevance to our modern civilization in its superstitious reverence for science and its apotheosis of technology.

Or we may turn our attention to myths of a different sort—those that speak of the end, of the cataclysmic dissolution of the heavens and the earth, of final judgment. If we think of these stories as predictions of events to come, they seem out of another world, and the man of the twentieth century will just shrug his shoulders. But once more we can look for the self-understanding which they seek to bring to expression and see their relevance. They teach us that these lives of ours are finite, not just in the sense that they are created, but in the sense that each one of us stands before the approaching end—his own death. It was Brunner who remarked that America has created a billion-dollar industry to help people forget about death. In giving us a true understanding of ourselves, the Bible does not blink the fact of death but teaches that in these limited, unrepeatable lives of ours we are responsible for what we are and that even now judgment is working itself out in the fabric of our existence.

These examples illustrate how Bultmann goes about the interpretation of myth. If we ask the right questions—the questions about human existence—these remote stories yield up their meaning and touch upon our lives with a directness that is sometimes uncomfortable.

The second idea which we mentioned as important in Bultmann's thought is that of the kerygma—the proclamation of a divine word addressed to man. Here Bultmann retains the kerygmatic character which has been so prominent in theology since Barth. The whole aim and object of demythologizing is, indeed, to allow the kerygma to speak to the men of our time in language that they will understand. In the Bible, the kerygma has a mythical setting. Bultmann thinks that if it is to be understood, it must be brought out of that setting and shown to be relevant to the modern world, as supplying the answers to those existential questions which men are asking. If this is not done, then Christianity in our time may be not so much rejected as simply ignored and regarded as a thing unintelligible. As a word of God addressed to our human existence, the kerygma should be expressible in terms that bear directly on this existence of ours.

The kerygma centers, of course, on the mighty acts of God in Jesus

Christ, and particularly in his cross and resurrection. The Christian believes that in these events God acted decisively in this human situation of ours, transforming it and bringing to man grace, hope, and the possibility of a new life. But how are we to think of these events? In one way of looking at them, they are events of the past—they happened at another time and in another place. How, then, can they have anything to do with people who live today? The man who is overwhelmed with the perplexities of the present may well be puzzled if he is told to seek his salvation in something that took place long ago, and he may well be tempted to dismiss it as irrelevant to him and his needs.

Bultmann would reply that just as in the case of the stories of creation or of the end, so the central Christian message of the cross and resurrection becomes relevant to people of our time when it is brought into the present and, so to speak, re-enacted in our own existence. Again it is a question of self-understanding, and more particularly of the transition from the understanding of existence that belongs to the "natural" man to the understanding that is given to the "new" man in Christ. "Although the advent of Christ is an historical event which happened 'once' in the past, it is, at the same time, an eternal event which occurs again and again in the soul of any Christian in whose soul Christ is born, suffers, dies and is raised up to eternal life." [1] Thus to believe in the cross of Christ is not just to believe that once upon a time Christ died for the sins of the world, but rather to make his cross one's own, to die with him to the world. Similarly, faith in the resurrection is the experience in the present of the new and fuller life which follows upon acceptance of the cross—a life which no longer seeks its security in earthly things but is oriented toward God and maintained by his grace.

This teaching of Bultmann's emphasizes ideas that were already clearly expressed in the New Testament, especially in the Pauline and Johannine writings. Bultmann would go so far as to say that in these writings we already see a tendency toward demythologizing. The notion that the mighty acts are somehow "re-enacted" in the life of the individual believer must have been vividly and dramatically represented in

[1] *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1957), p. 153. An edition published in this country is entitled *Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957).

the rite of baptism as practiced in the ancient churches. There still remain some of the ancient baptisteries built in the form of a well with a flight of steps leading down on the one side and up on the other. As the convert passed through the water, he was buried with Christ and rose with him into the new life. But just as Bultmann teaches that the mighty acts were, in his terminology, "eschatological" events—that is to say, events which are to be regarded not just as once-for-all happenings of past history but as continually repeated in the lives of believers—so he would insist that in the life of the individual Christian there must be not just an initial commitment but that the decision of faith must be continually renewed in each situation as it arises. Thus in his demythologizing he seeks to present the gospel as something concrete and actual which directly addresses the present existence of the individual in his most fundamental concerns.

As has already been said, a good many years have now passed since Bultmann put forward his views on demythologizing. Some scholars tell us that German theology is already entering a post-Bultmannian phase, and this is true in the sense that among Bultmann's disciples different schools of thought are emerging. A glance at these schools and their varying emphases will help to show us more clearly the merits and the dangers of demythologizing.

Under the influence of the Swiss theologian Fritz Buri, demythologizing has been given a more radical turn. Buri has eliminated the kerygmatic element in Bultmann's teaching. He sets Christianity on a level with the existentialist philosophies and sees in it simply a myth which embodies in its symbols an authentic existence for man. One can hardly refrain from regarding his views as a modern restatement of the ancient Gnostic heresies which had no interest in the historic Jesus and saw the essence of the gospel in a "gnosis" or secret wisdom by which salvation might be attained. The church decisively rejected the Gnostic point of view many centuries ago, and its reappearance in Buri's extreme kind of demythologizing shows that we must still be on our guard against it. There is a danger that if some elements of Bultmann's teaching get overemphasized, we may fall into errors of this kind and lose ourselves in what Harnack called "the shoreless sea of speculation."

Bultmann himself does not countenance these Gnostic developments of his views, though it must be acknowledged that some of his utterances have been ambiguous on this point. Yet he has always main-

tained the essential difference between Jesus Christ as a figure of actual history and the purely mythical redeemers of the Hellenistic cults. Thus we find another school among his disciples who are opening up anew the problem of the historical Jesus and seeking to define his significance for Christian theology.[2] This more conservative interpretation of demythologizing is not only closer to traditional theology but also more likely than Buri's version to appeal to the empirical temper of the English-speaking countries, where we have an inborn disposition to stick to facts and to distrust those who would lead us into the exploration of pure possibility.

However these various tendencies may develop in the future, demythologizing still holds the center of the stage in contemporary Continental theology and is likely to continue to do so for some time.

But, leaving aside the more academic questions, most of the readers of this journal will want to know what is the bearing of demythologizing on the practical tasks of preaching and teaching. The answer to this question has, we hope, already become clear in the preceding pages. Demythologizing is a conscious attempt to expound the gospel in relation to human existence, to exhibit its teaching as the answers to the questions that arise out of our existence: and we have suggested that nowadays these questions are never very far below the surface, even in lives that seem to be absorbed in concern with material things. Surely Bultmann's method has much to commend itself here in the task of communicating the message of the Bible to the people of today. It means, for instance, that if we are teaching a story of the blind seeing or the lame walking or the dead being raised, what we have to do is not to stress a miracle that happened long ago but the miracle that can happen now—the new life to which all such stories point, as variations on the central theme of cross and resurrection. We have to present the story in such a way that the hearer can so enter into it that he *understands himself* as blind or lame or dead in sin and understands also the possibility for him of a new life in Christ.[3] Again, if we have taken

[2] For an account of this development, see James M. Robinson's recently published book *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Chicago: A. R. Allenson, 1959).

[3] For an excellent illustration of such teaching, see the opening pages of Dr. R. McAfee Brown's book, *The Bible Speaks to You* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955).

an ethical theme, such as loving one's neighbor, we must try to teach it not as a vague general aspiration but as something that applies to the people we meet every day in our actual situations.

Even if we have reservations about some aspects of Bultmann's theology, even if we are slightly put off by the rather ugly word "demythologizing," we can recognize that here there is something of first-class importance for our teaching. And this teaching is not just for prisoners of war and displaced persons; for below the surface we are all "pilgrims and strangers" in the world, questing for meaning and wholeness. Demythologizing is an honest attempt, from which we can all learn, to restore to the gospel the relevance which, so often in our days, it seems to lack.

Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich

(*Continued from page 9*)

urgency of intervention in social and political affairs—strikes a responsive chord in the "individualist" Western mind of today. How far the sense of everyday social responsibility can be preserved, and combined with the absorbing concern for the private and the inward, is another question. It is here, above all, that Niebuhr has his word to say, as fresh and as relevant as it ever was.

It has not been my purpose to explore the doctrinal ramifications of the two fundamental outlooks I have brought forward to confront each other; I have not even indicated the larger problems arising out of them—Tillich's pantheizing tendency, for example, or the difficulties inherent in Niebuhr's unmitigated dichotomy of nature and history. For the moment at least, what is important seems to me to be something much more elementary: to realize how deep is the chasm that separates the presuppositions with which these two men, so often linked together, operate; indeed, how essentially different are the enterprises in which they are engaged. Tillich is attempting to construct a theology that will "correlate" with his ontological philosophy; Niebuhr has, for more than a generation, been preoccupied with clarifying the relevance of the biblical-Christian faith to man's historical concerns. We can, and should, learn from both; but we will be doing justice to neither if we overlook or obscure the radical divergence in the thinking of these two great "neo-orthodox" theologians on God, man, and human existence.

PAUL L. HAMMER

Impressions of the Theological Situation in Europe

Dr. Hammer will be remembered by former USAREUR chaplains who knew him as a student at Heidelberg or, later, as a pastor in Bad Godesberg, Germany.

HAVING been asked to write briefly on the above topic, I feel that it may be in order first to say a word about the source of these impressions. They come largely from six years spent in Germany between 1952 and 1958, two and a half years as a graduate student at the University of Heidelberg and three and a half years as pastor of the international and interdenominational American Protestant Church at Bonn/Bad Godesberg. These years afforded the opportunity to get to know the German scene especially, and to travel and speak with people in most western European countries.

In Germany I was a member of the Ecumenical Committee of the *Kirchentag* and had extensive personal contact with some of the "evangelical academies." I spent some days at the Reformed Church "monastery" at Taize in France and with the Russian Orthodox in Paris, also at the Iona Community in Scotland, and a month studying the church in Sweden. As a Protestant it was extremely helpful for me to live a total of nine weeks in two Roman Catholic monasteries (Dominican and Benedictine), and while in Bonn to participate in a monthly theological discussion group composed of five Roman Catholic priests and five Protestant ministers. These factors are part of the background from which I share some "impressions," and they are intended to be only that. I shall center them about three focal points: the Bible, the church, and the laymen's movements.

My first impression concerns the central role of the Bible. Beginning with Karl Barth's emphasis on "The Word of God" after World War I and extending into the crisis experiences and resistance to tyranny in World War II, the theological climate came to be characterized by a rediscovery of the Bible. This does not mean a literalistic and mechanical biblicism; rather, a rediscovery that accepts largely the fruits of literary and form criticism (of such men as Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann) and sees how such scholarly endeavor helps to impart the living message of the Bible to the man in the pew.

In Germany, and I think in most of Europe, a sermon always begins with a biblical text, and it is the task of the sermon to "break open" the text for those who listen. The sermons of German pastors are seldom lacking in theological depth or correctness. These pastors are known as "theologians," and rightly so. They know their Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Their theoretical theological studies at the universities last usually five or six years, though they begin these immediately after their thirteen years of primary and secondary education.

The danger is that biblical sermons may become theological essays which many in a congregation will not be able to grasp. If we as American pastors err in a "practical" direction, being able to communicate but having little to say, many Europeans have much to say but fail to communicate it. It would seem that we in America need more of the thorough grounding in biblical studies (happily this is increasing) that is characteristic of Europe, and that they, on the other hand, need more of the American practical emphasis. As a German friend said to me: "To have a sermon, one must put together an exegesis of the Bible and an exegesis of the congregation." My first impression, then, is the central emphasis on the Bible both in scholarly circles and in the life of the congregations.

My second impression concerns the rediscovery of the community of the church. In Europe the church is generally regarded as an institution—in many countries an institution to which nearly everyone belongs—but there is often little understanding of the church as a community. Again the crisis experiences of World War II proved to be a decisive factor in the rediscovery of the church as a community.

Part of this is what has been called a liturgical renewal. Here I would point illustratively to such a center as the Benedictine Abbey at Maria Laach. There the celebration of the Mass itself emphasizes the church

as the people of God, the family of God. The priest always faces the congregation. He stands behind the altar and becomes in Christ's stead the host at a table around which the family of God is assembled. The altar is being restored to the congregation. The theme of the Protestant *Kirchentag* in Munich this year is: "You shall be my people."

This liturgical renewal involves the rediscovery of the church as community in such monastic or semimonastic centers as those within the Anglican communion, the French Reformed church at Taize, the German church at Darmstadt (for women), and the "high church" movement in the Swedish church. Such movements recover a sense of community, finding their center in daily worship, and witness to the whole church what the essence of the church is.

Similar emphases are not lacking on the American scene, but it would seem that the suffering through which so many Europeans have passed gives a theological depth to this renewal that is largely unknown in our country. The changing of our sanctuary architecture can hardly be identified with a rediscovery of the church. In Europe, where in the past two decades a sense of genuine community largely fell apart, the liturgical renewal is leading to a rediscovery of community and a rediscovery of the church as God's family.

With regard to Roman Catholic and Protestant relations, I found that a genuine conversation about theological concerns is taking place. In this country there may be a united effort in working together on social problems, but a meeting of Roman Catholics and Protestants to discuss *theological* questions is to me largely unknown. In the monthly discussion group mentioned above we really came to grips with most of the central Christian doctrines, discovering that often we had caricatured each other and that on many of the central doctrines there really was no difference at all. Even on the doctrine of the church we found more in common than we had previously realized, and throughout our discussions there was a genuinely mutual acceptance of each other as Christian brothers. It would seem to me that such conversation can lead also to a discovery of more of the total meaning of the ecumenical church.

My third impression concerns the laymen's movements. Hendrik Kraemer's book *A Theology of the Laity* (note *of*, not *for*) points to this rediscovery of the laity. Among both Roman Catholics and Protestants there is a new postwar emphasis on the role of the laity—

better, the *essence* of the laity—in the church. Such Protestant movements as the *Kirchentag* and the evangelical academies in Germany, *Kerk en Wereld* in Holland, the Iona Community in Scotland, and the Sigtuna Foundation in Sweden serve as illustrations of this.

In Germany after the war there grew up a conviction on the part of such laymen as Dr. von Thadden-Trieglaff (president of the *Kirchentag*) and Eberhard Mueller (founder of the first academy) that the Christian message was not something to be bottled up within the institutional church. It was something to be carried out into every facet of German life and there in the lives of laymen to give witness to the presence of the church. Their concern was not only a stewardship of Christians within the church (as Sunday-school teachers, committee members, financial supporters, etc.) but also a stewardship of the church *in the world* to reconcile the world to God in the practical affairs of daily life.

This was not a shallow belief in their ability to "build the Kingdom of God." It was a deeply theological conviction that they were responsible to God for all of life, that Christ had come to redeem secular vocations, that really there can be no distinction between sacred and secular. All of life belongs to God, and therefore all of it is a sacred responsibility.

The *Kirchentag* movement called together vast improvised congregations for worship and for the study of the concrete problems of family, education, urban life, rural life, industry, politics. As Christian laymen they regarded these areas as their Christian responsibility. The church was not a pastors' church; it was their church. And thus the rediscovery of the laity is also a rediscovery of the church.

I was able to attend the 1954 *Kirchentag* in Leipzig behind the Iron Curtain and the 1956 *Kirchentag* in Frankfurt and there to see what these laymen are trying to do. However, this movement which was begun by laymen now has many theologians participating in it too. In one way this is good; in another it poses the threat of making a laymen's *movement* only another place for theologians to exchange their ideas.

The task of the academies is similar. There are 19 of these centers in East and West Germany and another 28 scattered about Europe. There the vocational emphasis is central. People gather from week to week on largely a vocational basis—factory workers, bankers, jour-

nalists, students, pastors, labor leaders, etc.—to discuss together their particular concerns. Persons are invited who do not necessarily stand within the church. The academies are intended to be a meeting place between the church and the world, and they often become places where some for the first time begin to see the relevance of the Christian message to their life and work.

One center in Mainz-Kastel seeks not only to reach industrial workers especially but also to train pastors for parishes in industrial areas. This same emphasis is to be found in the Iona Community in Scotland and corresponds to what was the worker-priest movement in France. Pastors and laymen are realizing that the church cannot simply call men to enter her doors. She must go out and seek men where they are and demonstrate in the midst of the workaday world the universal relevance of the Christian message. Thus the rediscovery of the essence of the laity is a rediscovery of the totality of the church and her mission in the world.

Summing up, my impressions of the theological situation in Europe today have not dealt with questions of theological doctrine directly. The central biblical affirmation that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" is the central affirmation of all European theology. I have dealt with some of the more practical implications of that theology in relationship to the Bible, the church, and the laymen's movements.

I do not want to leave the impression that what I have written is universally true. These impressions are in part rather isolated examples of some of the things that are happening on the European theological scene. There is a great deal of religious apathy in all countries, and the percentage of those who are active in churches is relatively small. Nevertheless, the theological concerns I have noted indicate bright spots from which theologians and laymen are seeking to proclaim afresh the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

WILLIAM R. MUELLER

The Human Condition in Modern Fiction

IN HIS *Areopagitica* John Milton refers to the "sage and serious poet Spenser, whom," he writes, "I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas." Milton is saying that a man wishing to learn of good and evil, wishing to know himself, would gain better schooling from the imaginative literature of a poet than from the expository writings of a theologian. T. S. Eliot, at a later date, again juxtaposes poet and theologian or philosopher, but with a difference. He argues that the philosopher is the thinker or the system builder and that the poet, no thinker, expresses "the emotional equivalent of thought," giving imaginative and compelling form to philosophic matter. If both Milton and Eliot are correct, the literary artist is an indispensable, if not very intellectual, middleman between philosopher and layman; dependent as he is on the "thinker," the "thinker" is also dependent upon him to make understandable and palatable his thoughts. Though we might question this simple Q.E.D., the fact remains that theologian and poet have an important relationship: Aquinas and Dante are as indissolubly wed as Romeo and Juliet, Cohen and Kelly, Sodom and Gomorrah, or Dan and Beersheba.

The theologian proper generally follows more or less the way of Paul's epistles; he is interested in the relatively bare presentation of what he believes to be the facts about the nature of God and the nature of man under God; his method will be reasoned and logical, if paradoxical, exposition. He is, as Paul Tillich has said, concerned with the ultimate. If he is in the Judeo-Christian tradition, he will look primarily to the Bible as the foundation stone of his own proclamations, and he will seek to produce a systematic statement of truth which is consistent with biblical proclamation and empirical experience. He will find in such men as Aquinas and Calvin his most

worthy prototypes. Among living theologians, Karl Barth, I would think, most closely fulfills this academic definition.

The "sage and serious poet" (and I shall use the word "poet" as the generic term for any feigning, imagining, fictional writer in verse or prose) may be equally concerned with the ultimate, but he goes about his business in a different way. His presentation of his questions or his convictions is less direct and literal, but at the same time more concrete and dramatic, than that of the theologian. He makes far more use of simile and metaphor and symbol, of parable and allegory and myth. He feels less responsible for presenting a comprehensive system of belief than for producing brilliant thrusts of insight. His assault and provocation are sometimes more upon man's imagination than upon his intellect. For him the Bible may be a foundation stone or an outdated and misleading fortress which needs to be destroyed; but if he is a Western writer, he will feel it necessary to reckon with the Bible, whether he views it as saving truth or demonic error.

This essay will suggest a few writers of our time who seem to me eminently worthy of the title "sage and serious." I will confine myself to novelists, and to those who analyze with great sensitivity the condition of the contemporary man living under the love and the wrath of God; to those whose themes are sin and redemption, judgment and mercy, grace and free will, love and hate; to those inspired persons to whom Milton would look, as he did to Spenser, for their skill in seeing to the core the ultimate problems which beset us and in teaching us a great deal about ourselves and about the natural and supernatural world in which we live. What follows is little more than a starting bibliography, and my statements will be general and simple, doing scant justice to the works mentioned. The modest purpose of this essay is to suggest a few modern writers who may be of considerable interest, enjoyment, and enlightenment to a person who would like to see what some of the most eminent and perceptive writers of our time have to say about the human condition.

Certainly one good place to begin would be with the novels of Graham Greene and Ignazio Silone, both of whom are very much concerned with man's condition under God and both of whom are, as contemporary novelists go, relatively easy to understand. The Roman Catholic Greene makes a frontal attack on conventional morality and religion and on the church which, possessing the keys of the Kingdom, has a

peculiar notion of the ways in which they uniock the heavenly gates. *The Power and the Glory* is the story of a Mexican "whisky priest" who has fathered a child in his priesthood and who, in and through his very corruption, has learned the meaning of love. When he has reached, in the eyes of the world, the depths of moral degradation, he thinks back to the early pious years of his priesthood, comparing his past with his present, and, as Greene writes, ". . . it sometimes seemed to him that venial sins—impatience, an unimportant lie, pride, a neglected opportunity—cut off from grace more completely than the worst sins of all. Then, in his innocence, he had felt no love for anyone: now in his corruption he had learnt. . . ." He wonders if the last thing God forgives may not be "the habit of piety." And though a price has been set on his head by those in political power, though other priests have defected from their calling, surrendering to the tyranny which demanded that they no longer hear confession, or pray, or celebrate the Mass, the whisky priest is led by his love for sinners and his passion for their salvation to persist in his ministrations until he dies a martyr's death. The paradoxical implication of the novel is that the person guilty of the worst sins may possess a sanctity unknown to the outwardly obedient and self-righteous.

Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* is woven from the same cloth. The scene is West Africa; the protagonist is Henry Scobie, an English major in the Colonial police force. But the central theme and paradox are the same. Scobie, moved by his compassion for his fellows, is led into strange ways—dereliction of duty, adultery, profanation of the Mass, and suicide—but the implication of the novel, like that of *The Power and the Glory*, is that the worst of "sinners" has been led to lay down his life for his friends.

To turn from Greene to the Italian Ignazio Silone is to turn from what is primarily a study of man's struggle with himself to a study of man's struggle with the political and social order. The protagonists of two of Silone's novels, Pietro Spina of *Bread and Wine* and Rocco de Donatis of *A Handful of Blackberries*, both spokesmen for Silone himself, renounced the church into which they had been born when its priesthood capitulated to the government in power, sought their salvation in a Marxism which with them condemned the corrupt society and church in which they lived, and then learned that the new political leaders were as corrupt as the ecclesiastics. The ideal

of both characters is stated in a school essay written by Spina: "I should not like to live according to circumstances, environment, and material expediency, but I should like, ignoring the consequences, in every hour of my life to live and struggle for that which seems to me to be right and good." The twentieth-century Italian church is as much in need of house cleaning as was the Temple in the time of Jesus; and if the church is corrupt within, then the contemporary man of God may have to work from without. The wise old Don Benedetto tells Spina that the Lord "does not attach very much importance to His name," and that his truest workers may have to adopt pseudonyms. "Might not the ideal of social justice that animates the masses today," he asks Spina, "be one of the pseudonyms the Lord is using to free Himself from the control of the churches and the banks?"

A Handful of Blackberries is a beautifully told tale with essentially the same theme. It is a passionate entreaty to stand firm for one's freedom, to know that power almost inevitably corrupts, to realize that one must love justice more than he fears oppression. Rocco and those few who follow him, unchurched as they are, are nevertheless the real saints of the contemporary world of tyranny. And if both the Church Militant and the Marxist Party, failing to abide by their early professed ideals of freedom, have sold out to the power structure, then the courageous and righteous man must with others of his kind comprise that remnant which will, alienated from dominant church and dominant party, do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

For somewhat more difficult fare, a reader might turn to the novels of Albert Camus and Franz Kafka, who have spoken as interestingly and perceptively of the human condition as any of our twentieth-century writers. Camus's *The Plague* is the story of a deadly pestilence in the city of Oran, Algeria, and the heroic response to its presence. The novel is based on the metaphor that the plague *is* the human condition, that, as Tarrou says, "each of us has the plague within him." The most fascinating aspect of the narrative consists of the various responses which the bubonic plague elicits. The priest, Father Paneloux, sees it both as the scourge of God, a calamity not willed by God but induced by man's persistent sinfulness, and as a kind of divine visitation which works to the good of the Christian who is willing to surrender himself totally to God's mysterious wisdom and love and to accept the unacceptable, even the death of an innocent child. To the

hunted criminal Cottard it is a relief; for though he was formerly one of the small minority of fugitives fearing possible death if captured, he may now take his place in the company of the Oranians, almost every one of whom fears death. To the journalist Rambert, a stranger quarantined in the city, the plague brings a sense of community and solidarity with other human beings. To the compassionate and atheistic Tarrou, the catastrophe encourages him in his quest to become a saint—a saint who does not believe in God. To the narrator Dr. Rieux, who so unstintingly and selflessly gives himself to the combatting of the disease, the plague is that which enables him most adequately to carry on what he sees as the primary function of his calling—the "fighting against creation as he found it." The novel is a tale of heroic persons, believers and nonbelievers, who would bind the wounds and cure the fevers of this plague-ridden world.

Along with *The Plague* one might also read Camus's *The Fall,* the first-person narrative of Jean-Baptiste Clamence, whose name ironically suggests a contemporary John the Baptist, a voice crying in the wilderness. Once an esteemed Parisian lawyer, Clamence has now taken up his residence in Amsterdam, whose concentric canals symbolize the circles of hell which house the damned. His fall consists not of a loss of innocence but of his recognition that the revered life which he once led was a mere sham, that he had always manipulated other persons to solace his own ego. The novel is a careful study of man's conviction of his sin, if not of his hope of salvation.

The two great novels of Franz Kafka, *The Trial* and *The Castle,* allegorical or semiallegorical in form, narrate a man's (or perhaps Man's) quest for justice and salvation. The mood of both novels is nightmarish fantasy. The protagonist of *The Trial,* Joseph K., awakes one morning to discover that he is under arrest, but for what reason he cannot fathom—nor can the arresting officers enlighten him. The novel is his search for justice: he strives either to be declared innocent or to be apprised of the nature of his guilt. Kafka implies that man is by his very nature guilty and that the more he seeks to establish a nonexistent innocence, the more he commits himself to a course which is unremittingly frustrating, to a life which provides no sign of acquittal. If he admits his guilt, then he must come to know that forgiveness and redemption come from no human source, that his salvation can be effected neither by himself nor by any other person. As K.

progresses through the one year which is the duration of the novel's action, he moves on toward a knowledge of self and a conviction of sin. The final chapter, relating the mysterious circumstances of K.'s death, is ambiguous, and the reader may long debate whether the chastened and enlightened Joseph K. will dwell peacefully with the Redeemer on the other side of death.

The Castle, a fitting companion piece to *The Trial*, relates the long and seemingly fruitless struggle of K. (who bears some resemblance to Joseph K.) to gain access to the Castle, which represents some awful and mysterious state of grace. At the beginning of the novel K. arrives at the village which lies at the foot of the Castle, claiming that he has been summoned by the Castle authorities to serve as Land Surveyor. His incessant and vain attempts to storm the ramparts form the narrative of this work, which ends inconclusively; the novel was never finished and, since Kafka was in some modest doubt about the nature of the Castle, probably never could have been.

William Faulkner, I think, has spoken more profoundly of the human condition than any other American novelist since Hawthorne and Melville. *A Fable*, though not Faulkner's greatest novel, is particularly relevant to this essay. It is the story of some striking events in World War I during one week in late May, 1918. A single French regiment, inspired by a peace-seeking corporal named Stefan, brought the fighting to a temporary end by mutinously laying down their arms. The narrative is, as the title suggests, a fable, in which the corporal is a Christ figure and other characters and various events are reminiscent of the gospel narratives. The duration of the novel's primary action, complemented by flashbacks, is one week, the Holy Week in the life of Stefan. Conceived not by his mother's husband, born on Christmas Day in a stable, the corporal has helped heal the blind, produced wine for a wedding festival, and succored the poor. During the last week of his life he strives for a peace surpassing understanding, is betrayed, tempted, and, on a Friday at the age of thirty-three, dies a martyr's death between two wretches executed with him (but dies with body unbroken and head wreathed with barbed wire). His buried body is sought in vain by three devoted women on Sunday morning. Within the fable are figures suggestive of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, of Mary Magdalene, Paul, and Judas with his thirty pieces of silver.

A greater novel is Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Less explicitly

theological than *A Fable*, it nevertheless has its own Easter week end and lays bare the human condition with remarkable penetration. A story of the degeneration of the Compson family within their native Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi, it plays upon the themes of idiocy, suicide, aborted incest and other forms of moral depravity, and yet suggests, principally in the rocklike figure of Dilsey, that there abides in mankind a compassionate love which courageously meets, endures, and seeks to heal the uttermost miseries of this world. I should note that Faulkner's novels require a most mature and careful reading, but the painstaking and enduring reader will be amply rewarded for his trouble.

Finally, let us turn to the most highly publicized novel of the 1950's, Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. In essence this Russian saga is a philosophy of history, affirming that the world has not yet taken notice of the immense historical implications of the birth, life, and death of Christ. We live, Pasternak insists, as if there has been no Christ event; we live in craven subjection to the beast, the Adamic nature within us, surrendering ourselves not to the truth of Christ but to our passion for belonging to and conforming to the fallen world whose counters are tyranny and force. We live in a pre-Christ world where the important entity is the nation, not the individual person. We remain blind to the real meaning and significance of Christ's coming, which if heeded would mark the birth of individualism and the death of nationalism. The nature of the old order is typically expressed in the Old Testament miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea, whose opening heralded the freedom of a nation; typologically juxtaposed to this miracle is the New Testament miracle of the birth of Christ, in which the opening of Mary's womb effected the birth and freedom of an individual, of individualism itself. But the twentieth-century man, and not the Russian alone, still clings to the old historical order. The present human condition is one of fear engendered by the oppression of tyrannous nations, rather than one of freedom born with and of Christ, and possessed only by those few who adhere to the new historical and redemptive order proclaimed by the coming of Christ.[1]

[1] For a more detailed study of Joyce, Camus, Kafka, Faulkner, Greene, and Silone, see the author's *The Prophetic Voice in Modern Fiction* (New York: Association Press, 1959).

THEODORE A. GILL

"The World Has Come of Age"

FROM Dietrich Bonhoeffer comes the phrase that for some of us sets the theological (and the ethical and the liturgical and the ecclesiological) problem of the next generation. Writing from a Nazi concentration camp shortly before his execution, the young Bonhoeffer looked back over all he had thought and preached and taught till then, and looked ahead to what would have to be done to his thinking and preaching and teaching if he lived beyond his imprisonment. Drastic reworking would be in order; he saw new departures, new directions. Because, as he said, "the world has come of age" and none of the church's statements and strategies set for an earlier situation fit the new fact.

"The world has come of age"—a teaser of a phrase. It may help to see what is in the words by going at them backwards. If we say that the world is now of age, we suggest at the same time that there was a time when the world was not of age. And of course as soon as you say that you remember that time. There certainly was a time when the world (the Western world, this Christendom) was nursed and swaddled by the church, when our world was shepherded and tutored by the church, when the world took orders like an obedient child from the church. Then it was that the world's politicians, economists or commercial men, scientists, artists, philosophers, turned to the church for the answers which they had to arrive at in their own disciplines, for the directions they would have to follow in their particular departments, even for the information which was proper to their areas. The church was the mother in those days, the church was the Big Lady, the church was the boss.

The plain and obvious fact now is that *that* is over. The world has come of age. The disciplines in the human enterprise recognize their own competence. They do not go to the church or to anyone else to find out what they have to find out in their own areas. All the disciplines now explore their own possibilities, their own vitalities, their own potentialities. They have realized their independence; they have declared their autonomy. The world has come of age.

Now the world did not attain its majority overnight, of course. The Renaissance and Reformation were obviously an episode in the world's maturation. Then it was that the umbilical cord between the church and its child, our world, was nicked. The world, perhaps not as grateful as it ought to have been for its long gestation, tugged at the line. In the Enlightenment the cord was wrenched clean away. Then the sciences declared the independence they had long recognized. Philosophers and philosophies claimed their autonomy. They would not longer square their philosophic conclusions with the church. What has happened today is that now even the silver cord, the apron strings, have been cut between church and world. Now all the world's disciplines have asserted their own competence.

So what do we do about the new state of affairs (not so new, really, but only recently recognized)? Do we try to press the world back into the church's tutelage? Do we insist that the church still has all the answers to all the questions, the solutions to all the problems in every area of human enterprise? There are Christians, of course, who say yes to this. Catholics do, and so do some hyperconservative Protestants (who, as at so many other times, are more Roman Catholic than Protestant on this question—crypto-Catholics, and not so "crypto-" at that).

Others, however, will see and say that such resubordination of the world is impossible. However much nostalgia wishes, hopes, prays it, that is no longer possible. Among these Christians will be some (those on whom everything now depends) who hold that such return is not only impossible but undesirable. These are the Christian thinkers who are trying to persuade us to take the doctrine of creation more seriously than we Protestants ever have. To do that, we will have to get over our nervousness about the world, will have to admit that not everything that happens in the creation is necessarily bad. We will have to accept the notion that the world's possibilities are built into the creation, and are to be realized where they are found, by whatever men are most at home in whatever area the possibilities wait. We will have to quit thinking of a once-and-for-all creation "back there" about which Christians already know all that is worth knowing. We will have to get used to thinking of a creation "back there" in which vitality and dynamism were made part of the parcel, so that germination processes are the created order of every day, and nobody, not even the church, can ever know it all, and the surprising things that happen are not necessarily "our fault," are not

necessarily bad. They may be, of course, but not necessarily. What works out *may* be the working out of the creation itself.

Those who feel this way, then, will not bewail the world's coming of age, but will see this too as part of a possibility that has lain in the creation since the beginning. And they will think and act in a church which must now find other than traditional ways to state the gospel's constant relevance, ways less concerned with giving the superlatively informed world answers about itself, more concerned with asking the world questions about the shadowed context of its brilliant competence.

The theology and the churchmanship that will be availing in a world now of age will be in Christians who do not any more claim to know everything about anything, but who confess only that they have known God in Christ, and who are ready to go at the hard work of figuring out what difference this single claim makes to a world we cannot again dominate, and how best that difference can be made by a church that doesn't want to dominate anyway.

BOOKS

A SURVEY

Recent Books in Systematic Theology

This brief survey, prepared by Claude Welch, is reprinted by permission from the March 1959 edition of Yale Divinity News. *Dr. Welch speaks of it as "a highly selective account of significant books in the area of systematic theology which have appeared in the last three or four years."*

AT THE HEAD of the list must be put the English translation of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (published by T. & T. Clark; also available from Scribner). Since 1956 there have appeared the second half of Volume I, *The Doctrine of the Word of God;* both parts of Volume II, *The Doctrine of God* (comprising chapters on "The Knowledge of God," "The Reality of God," "God's Gracious Election," and "God's Commandment"); and two parts of Volume IV, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation.* The four parts of Volume III, *The Doctrine of Creation,* are in preparation. Of course, these books are long, difficult and expensive. They are technical theology of a magisterial sort. But they are not therefore of importance merely to the professional theologian. Anyone who is even halfway serious about Christian theology, whether he agrees or disagrees with Barth in general or in detail, simply cannot afford to neglect firsthand study of Barth. The sheer force and creativity of his thought, the richness of development, and the exegetical insight will recompense earnest struggle with him.

In a similar vein, we may note the further elaboration of two other major contemporary theological perspectives:

Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology,* Volume II (*Existence and the Christ,* University of Chicago, 1957), includes not only the crucial and provocative Christological material but also an important introduction dealing with questions raised concerning the first parts of his system. Two other recent works of Tillich's are of particular interest: *The Dynamics of Faith* (Harper 1957) and a volume of sermons, *The New Being* (Scribner 1955).

New light on Rudolf Bultmann's thought will be found in his *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh 1957; the Gifford lectures for 1955), and *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (Scribner 1958; the Shaffer lectures delivered at Yale in 1951).

A variety of new and highly useful publications may be grouped together under the rubric of survey and interpretation. *Christianity and the Existentialists,* edited by Carl Michalson (Scribner 1956), includes

some exciting studies of Kierkegaard (by H. R. Niebuhr), Unamuno, Berdyaev, Marcel, Heidegger, and Hölderlin and Rilke, together with an attempt at a definition of existentialism (by Michalson) and an essay by Tillich on "Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art." Gustav Wingren's *Theology in Conflict* (Muhlenberg 1958) deals with Barth, Bultmann, and Nygren. The second volume in the "Library of Living Theology" is *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, edited by C. W. Kegley and R. Bretall (Macmillan 1956). *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (Meridian 1958; a paperback in the "Living Age" series) contains 101 "definition essays," ranging from one to a half-dozen pages, on a wide variety of topics and doctrines. Another paperback, *Ten Makers of Modern Protestant Thought*, edited by George L. Hunt ("Reflection Book," Association Press, 1958) is composed of succinct, reliable introductions, which might also be recommended to interested lay people. John Baillie, in *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (Oxford University [London] and Columbia University, 1956), has provided a very helpful survey and analysis of the present scene.

Baillie's study leads us into the area of works on particular doctrines. Out of the spate of books on the Church, I should commend the following as especially worth study: H. R. Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (Harper 1956); Paul S. Minear, ed., *The Nature of the Unity We Seek* (Bethany 1958; the official report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order, held at Oberlin, 1957); and Albert C. Outler, *The Christian Tradition and the Unity We Seek* (Oxford 1957). An excellent study of a troublesome problem is Roger Hazelton's *God's Way with Man* (Abingdon 1956; an expansion of the Taylor lectures for 1955), which treats of the meaning of providence in highly readable fashion.

George S. Hendry, of Princeton, has given us two first-rate books, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology* (Westminster 1956)—this is the best recent book on the Spirit—and *The Gospel of the Incarnation* (Westminster 1958). In the title of the latter work the emphasis should be laid on the word "Gospel," since the book is dominantly an interpretation of the work of Christ, of atonement, rather than of incarnation doctrine. Here are lucid historical analysis and suggestive construction.

Two other good books on the work of Christ are H. A. Hodge's *The Pattern of Atonement* (SCM 1955) and William J. Wolf's *No Cross, No Crown* (Doubleday 1957). Richard R. Niebuhr's *Resurrection and Historical Reason* (Scribner 1957) is valuable not only because of its focus on resurrection but also as a study in theological method and a com-

mentary on major theologians.

Three recent Doubleday publications deal with the theme of man in sin and salvation in a way useful both to the minister and to the thoughtful layman: Alexander Miller, *The Renewal of Man* (1955) and *The Man in the Mirror* (1958), and E. LaB. Cherbonnier, *Hardness of Heart* (1955).

As an aid in the search for good material for use in lay theological discussion groups, I would call special attention to Westminster Press's "Layman's Theological Library," in which nearly a dozen titles have been published since 1956.

Finally, I mention a few of the more significant paperback reprints of theological classics and semi-classics: in Harper's "Torchbook" series, F. Schleiermacher's *On Religion,* R. Otto's *The Idea of the Holy,* and H. R. Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture;* and in Meridian Books' "Living Age" series, Reinhold Niebuhr's *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic,* Dorothy Sayers' *The Mind of the Maker,* and Paul Tillich's *The Religious Situation.*

REVIEWS

Theology in Conflict: Nygren, Barth, Bultmann by GUSTAF WINGREN. Muhlenberg 1958. 170 pp. $3.25.

Every theologian comes to his material, whether it is the church's speech about God, or the Christian consciousness, or the Scriptures, with certain questions in his mind. The questions have arisen for him in his practical human situation as a person, as a church member, as a preacher and teacher. And no two sets of questions are quite alike. The difficulty many people encounter in reading theology is partly due to the fact that theologians do not state clearly what their questions are; partly it is due to their tendency to assume that their questions are the ones everyone is asking or ought to ask. The latter tendency results in the production of theologies that purport to set forth *the* system of Christian truth as a whole, as though faith were a matter of believing right answers to the right questions.

Professor Wingren does us a service in his critical examination of the theological statements made by Nygren, Barth, and Bultmann by uncovering some of the questions they ask of their material and by analyzing some of the answers to previous questions that they have accepted before beginning their theological work. In particular, he inquires what questions about man they are raising and what questions they address to Scriptures.

Nygren asks his material—the Scriptures and the church—"How can man have eternal life?" Barth asks, "How can man who does not know God come to the knowledge of God?" Bultmann asks, "How is

man brought to 'authentic' existence by the gospel?"

Each one in asking such questions has accepted as certain some answer to a previous unstated question. Nygren has previously asked, "What is man concerned about in his religion?" and has accepted the answer, "Eternity." Barth has asked, "What does man as such know about God?" and has accepted as the true answer, "Man as man knows nothing about God; he does not even know that he does not know." Bultmann has asked before he turned to the Scriptures, "What is man's condition?" and has answered that man is lost among illusions about himself and myths about the world.

Similarly, prior to their approach to the Scriptures these theologians have come to certain conclusions. Nygren has asked, "What is the Scriptures?" and has answered, "It is the book which sets forth the main *motifs* of an historical religion, namely, Christianity." Barth, with his conviction that man is totally ignorant of God, has answered the question about Scriptures by saying that it is the word about God and the word of God through which the entrance of the incarnate word of God into history is re-enacted. Bultmann deals with Scriptures as kerygma, as address to man in the present moment.

Professor Wingren shows how much these theologians must be understood not as men who are setting forth *the* "system of Christian truth" but as men seeking answers to certain questions; he also shows that the answers they accepted to previous questions may be questionable; and that in answering their own particular questions they fail to resolve other, more important human dilemmas.

But Professor Wingren also does something else. Despite reflections on the tentative and partial character of all theological inquiries, he assumes that there are *right* questions to which the gospel is the answer and that these questions are the ones all theologians ought to ask. The gospel, he says, is an answer to the question of guilt (pp. 16-17). While he concedes that it was Luther who so formulated the question, yet he maintains also that Luther's question is not only congruent with the biblical material (pp. 26-27) but is *the* biblical question (pp. 32, 34, 104, *et passim*). Further, the question about guilt is only raised where law is known. Thus Wingren has his own hermeneutical and anthropological presuppositions and maintains that these are better, more significant, more biblical, and lead to more inclusive answers than do the presuppositions of Nygren, Barth, and Bultmann.

Wingren has apparently asked himself, "Is the Bible one book or many?" and has answered, "One." Hence he can speak about the "intention of the Bible." He has asked himself, "What is the key to the

interpretation of Scriptures?" and he has answered, "Romans 1-5." These are not biblical presuppositions but presuppositions about the Bible. Nothing much is gained by calling them theological rather than philosophical unless we mean by this that they are presuppositions which have come as answers to personal religious questions, such as Luther's "How can I have a friendly God?" or Edwards' "How can I be reconciled to the divine sovereignty?" or Paul's "How can a man be righteous before God?" With what particular questions a man should come to the Scriptures or to the preaching of the church certainly cannot be dictated by theology.

What Wingren might have said more forcefully than he does is that where Nygren goes astray is in his belief that there is only one fundamental religious question, not in posing his specific question. Hence Nygren cannot deal adequately with "Agape" in the New Testament, for it is presented as an answer also to other questions besides the one he has in mind. However, the love theme in the New Testament cannot be taken either as an answer to what Wingren regards as the only right question, namely, the one about guilt. It is also offered as an answer to the question about God's righteousness, which is certainly a biblical question and one that cannot be reduced to the question of guilt. "Agape" is an answer also to the question about what is important in human conduct.

The present book is a helpful contribution to the understanding of the methods of theologians in posing questions and answers. It is too bad that it still suffers from the error of all dogmatism, namely, from the belief that the *right* questions which may be asked of the Bible, the church, or of the religious mind are very limited in number. Because Professor Wingren tends to do this, theology for him, as for the men he is criticizing (apart perhaps from Bultmann), is not a problem-solving inquiry, a science in its own domain, but an effort at the exposition of the *whole* truth, like a system of philosophy.

—H. Richard Niebuhr, *Professor of Theology and Christian Ethics, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Conn.*

(Reprinted by permission from the *Westminster Bookman*)

The Case for Orthodox Theology by Edward John Carnell. Westminster 1959. 162 pp. $3.50.

The Case for Theology in Liberal Perspective by L. Harold DeWolf. Westminster 1959. 206 pp. $3.50.

The Case for a New Reformation Theology by William Hordern. Westminster 1959. 176 pp. $3.50.

Three live options in Protestant theology are ably represented in these companion books. If you are looking for the best single volume on contemporary theology, you

should probably turn to the revised edition of Daniel Day Williams' *What Present-Day Theologians Are Thinking.* (See Harper's advertisement, Back Cover.) But for further study of the religious debate, these volumes are illuminating.

When Dr. Carnell, professor of apologetics at the conservative Fuller Theological Seminary, states the case for "orthodox theology," he defines orthodoxy as "that branch of Christendom which limits the ground of religious authority to the Bible." Although his position is not fundamentalism, which he describes as "orthodoxy gone cultic," it is a revision of the older position and has been called a "neofundamentalism." Because of Carnell's view of authority, the reader will examine with special interest the chapter on "Hermeneutics," where the author defines the rules he follows when searching out the meaning of Scripture.

The chief value of this book lies in its exposition of one theological position. The other two books have the same kind of expository or descriptive value, but they offer more stimulating points of contact with differing schools of thought.

The professor of systematic theology at Boston University School of Theology has given us his outline of Christian theology written in "liberal perspective." He covers all the main subjects—faith and reason, the Bible, the historical Jesus, God, the Trinity, man, the Christian life, ethics, the church, eschatology, and mission. However, the liveliest discussion will be found chiefly in the opening chapter ("God's Communication to Man"), where he sharpens the issues that divide his liberal perspective from conservative and neo-orthodox points of view. Especially interesting are his defense of natural theology, against the criticisms of Barth and others, and his discussion of the relation of faith and reason. The arguments are all the more interesting if you go on to read the third book and see how Dr. Hordern so ably handles the same themes.

This third book is written by the author of the article on Karl Barth that appears in this issue of THE CHAPLAIN. *The Case for a New Reformation Theology* will hold very great interest for any student of "major trends and issues." Not only does Hordern make a strong "case" for the movement usually labeled "neo-orthodoxy," but throughout the book he keeps in contact with other points of view and related fields of thought. He is especially helpful in pointing out the importance of recent developments in philosophy.

—J. A. L.

Jesus Christ and Mythology by RUDOLF BULTMANN. Scribner 1958. 96 pp. $1.95.

In five brief but meaty chapters Bultmann not only clarifies what he means by "mythology" and "de-

mythologizing" but answers many of the objections critics have raised against his thought in the lively debates of recent years.

To the objection that the attempt to demythologize takes the modern world view as the criterion of the interpretation of Scripture and the Christian message, allowing neither to speak for itself, Bultmann admits that he takes the modern world view as a criterion but denies that the message of Scripture and of the church is bound to an ancient world view which is obsolete—or, indeed, to *any* world view.

"Faith itself," he says, "demands to be freed from any world view produced by man's thought, whether mythological or scientific."

The objection that demythologizing turns Christian faith into philosophy arises from the fact that Bultmann makes use of conceptions developed especially by Martin Heidegger in existentialist philosophy.

Bultmann replies that demythologizing is a method of interpretation, of exegesis.

Does exegesis fall under the control of philosophy?

Yes, but how? Exegesis is always based on principles and conceptions which guide exegesis as presuppositions. These are derived from some philosophy or other. Of course, "an exegesis which . . . makes the presupposition that its results must agree with some dogmatic statement is not a real and fair exegesis. There is, however, a difference in principle between presuppositions in respect of results and presuppositions in respect of method." If Bultmann adopts a method shaped by questions asked in existentialist philosophy, he does so because he believes these are also the questions of personal existence asked by the Bible.

But how can the program of demythologizing be carried out completely? If the message of the New Testament is to be retained at all, we are bound to speak of God as *acting*. Is this not mythological?

Bultmann answers that the thought of the action of God as an unworldly and transcendent action can be protected from misunderstanding only if it is not thought of as an action which happens *between* the worldly actions or events, but as happening *within* them. This kind of myth, he holds, is not the object of demythologizing.

A serious objection follows: If God's hidden action is at work within the chain of secular events, isn't this pantheism?

Bultmann replies that faith insists not on the direct identity of God's action with worldly events but "on the paradoxical identity which can be believed only here and now against the appearance of non-identity."

But if God's action must be thought of as hidden, how is it possible to speak of it except in purely negative statements?

The response: To speak of God also means to speak of our personal existence.

Does it follow, then, that God's action is deprived of objective reality, that God exists only as an inner event in the soul, whereas faith has real meaning only if God exists outside the believer?

Bultmann emphatically denies this: "From the statement that to speak of God is to speak of myself, it by no means follows that God is not outside the believer. . . . When man is understood . . . as an historical being which has its reality in concrete situations and decisions, in the very encounters of life, it is clear, on the one hand, that faith, speaking of God as acting, cannot defend itself against the charge of being an illusion, and, on the other hand, that faith does not mean a psychologically subjective event."

A crucial and recurrent question is this one: If we must speak of God as acting only in the sense that he acts with me here and now, can we still believe that God has acted "once for all" on behalf of the whole world?

Bultmann responds that God's Word is his eternal Word, but this eternity is his presence always actualized here and now. "This 'once for all' is not the uniqueness of an historical event but means that a particular historical event, that is, Jesus Christ, is to be understood as the eschatological 'once for all.' As an eschatological event this 'once for all' is always present in the proclaimed word, not as a timeless truth, but as happening here and now."

At the same time, Bultmann admits that "this living Word of God is not invented by the human spirit and by human sagacity; it rises up in history. Its origin is an historical event, by which . . . the preaching is rendered authoritative and legitimate. This event is Jesus Christ."

Yet this is a paradoxical assertion, he says, for "the objectifying historian as such cannot see that an historical person (Jesus of Nazareth) is the eternal Logos, the Word." This is the work of faith, so that the *ground* of faith is at the same time the *object* of faith.

One of the most creative conceptions of the book appears in its last two pages, where Bultmann speaks of demythologizing as "the radical application of the doctrine of justification by faith to the sphere of knowledge and thought."

—J. A. L.

Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier by NATHAN A. SCOTT, JR. Harper 1958. 138 pp. $2.50.

For his most recent excursion into further "theonomous analysis" of this outpost of our culture, Professor Scott deserves the gratitude of those concerned about literature's role in contemporary society. Even more than his earlier *Rehearsals of Discomposure*, this book invites

some needed rethinking on the entire relationship between the literary work of art and religion.

The book appears, to this reader at any rate, as the logical culmination of a whole cluster of recent books and essays devoted to the exploration of religious truth in literature.[1]

Now such explorations, we may suppose, effectively (and all to the good) bury the notion of Matthew Arnold and the early I. A. Richards "that poetry will more and more take the place of the supernatural religion in which modern intellectuals can no longer believe." To thus make literature a surrogate for religion is to place an impossible burden on literature; the distinction between the two terms tends to dissolve; further, we are led inevitably to disturbances like Babbitt's neohumanism which confound culture with religion and ethical judgment with aesthetic evaluation.

Yet, the opposite assumption behind such books as Professor Scott's or Professor Wilder's, that "all our problems, from literature to politics, are ultimately religious," while it is fairly safe theoretically, often in critical practice leads to a similar confusion between literature and religion which frequently does violence to the literary work. In other words, the circle comes fully around from Arnold, and we are in danger, as Cleanth Brooks has warned, of having the clerical lion and the aesthetic lamb lie down "not together, but perhaps with one inside the other."

I am glad to report that Professor Scott's particular lamb remains, if a trifle shorn, wholly uneaten.

"Poetry, Religion, and the Modern Mind," the book's first chapter, properly scores the excesses of contemporary positivistic thought stemming from Hobbes and Locke which regard both religion and poetry as "amiable insanity" and which, from the 18th century on, resulted in what T. S. Eliot deplored as a "dissociation of sensibility." Scott sees science and religion and literature each giving "a special kind of symbolic truth" about human experience which the others cannot give. But then he adds—and here we get close to what I take to be his conception of the proper relationship between literature and religion—that when "properly read" literature will be "found to contain reports and prophecies . . . which religion certainly should be prepared to include among its evidences."

The phrase "properly read" is, for Scott, a crucial qualification. He is too much aware of the warnings of modern critics like Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and Cleanth Brooks to ignore the blunder made

[1] See, e.g.: H. M. Battenhouse, *Poets of Christian Thought*, 1947; Stanley R. Hopper, ed., *Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature*, 1952; Amos Wilder, *Modern Poetry and the Christian Tradition*, 1952.

by so many readers of translating a poem into readily paraphrased "truth" relevant in the "real world" outside the poem. Rather, to Scott an important literary work is animated by a creative intuition, an imagination fired by a "passion for order": this is its religious dimension, "intrinsic to and constitutive of the nature of literature," which yields to the reader the force of the work's "ultimate concern" and which urges the critic "finally to move beyond the level of verbal analysis to the level of metaphysical and theological valuation."

It is on this latter level of analysis that Professor Scott moves in his fourth and fifth chapters, "Man in Recent Literature" and ". . . Poetic and Religious Vision at the Present Time." He discovers in the writings of Kafka, Auden, Beckett, Salinger, Joyce, and others who speak to the modern soul that frequently "the fountains of spiritual renewal" issue most vigorously forth "outside the churches in uncanonical witness, prayer, and celebration." This discovery urges upon him the conviction that the Christian critic has the particular mission to effect "a reconciliation between the modern arts and the Church, between the creative imagination and the Christian faith."

He cannot accomplish his mission by narrow dogmatism or by complacent echoing of Christian principles. Quite the contrary, the Christian critic—insofar as he is being a *Christian* critic—will share with the artist a steady look at the dislocations of contemporary existence. In this sharing both gain.

The artist can help the Christian reader to "behold the full body of our time." The artist's job is to make the reader *see*. "Art in intention is mimesis," Professor Scott quotes from Auden's "New Year Letter." But then, having forced the soul "into the precincts of its last evasion," the artist's job is over. Now the Christian must commit himself in his encounter with experience.

On his part, the Christian critic can help the artist to see that "not only he who is in sin but also he who is in doubt is justified through faith." Seeing this, he may be helped further to face "the realm of finitude with serenity"—a serenity which informs his creations with "wonder, and expectancy, and with love and a proper adoration."

What I think most admirable about Professor Scott's book is his commitment to this high conception of the Christian critic's task.

—Paul Obler, *Assistant Professor of English, Drew University, Madison, N.J.*

NOTES

by Elizabeth P. Lam

Theology of Culture by Paul Tillich. Oxford 1959. 213 pp. $4.00.

To listen to Paul Tillich speak or teach is an unforgettable experience.

As he answers the questions from his audience, one is acutely aware of being in the presence of an original and profound thinker, of someone who, because of the depth of his experience and reflection upon it, has found wisdom for us all. Something of this quality of greatness is in this, his latest book. It is as though he were answering the "existential" questions of his unseen readers, so pointedly does he direct his chapters to pervading contemporary concerns.

To one unacquainted with his basic or "first principles," the first two sections offer a historical and psychological analysis of "existential theology." He places his thought in the historical stream of existentialism, stemming from Kierkegaard and Schelling, and then moves on to such questions as: the estrangement of man from his fellows (the problem of ethics), the finitude of man in time and space (the metaphysical questions), and the quest of man for self-understanding and purpose (the province of theology, religion, and depth psychology).

The bearing which his thought has on religious education, on the reformation of traditional theological concepts, and on the communication of the Christian message will be particularly suggestive to ministers and teachers. To those who recall the autobiographical sections of *The Religious Situation,* his discussions of "cultural comparisons" will hold special interest. He is still the thinker on the boundary between Europe and America but is much more conscious now of the strengths and dangers in the United States in relation to intercultural understanding. He introduces into international and intercultural relations a religious dimension which has significant implications not only for the philosopher but also for the man of action.

Communism and the Theologians: Study of an Encounter by CHARLES C. WEST. Westminster 1958. 399 pp. $6.00.

Charles West's book turns a new leaf in the history of Protestant social thought. It is, in the reviewer's opinion, the most significant book yet written on the Christian encounter with communism. It takes into account, more adequately and fully than any previous theological study, the varied facets of Marx's thought; it deals critically and realistically with the major Christian writers who have been concerned over the past 25 years with communism; it identifies the strengths of each but goes beyond them to questions which they did not ask. It is both a critical analysis of current Christian thought in relation to communism and a convincing affirmation of the resources within Christianity which, if drawn upon, could give new and creative direction to relations between the East and West.

It is impossible in a brief review to do justice to the theme and its substance. Marx's contribution—for

contribution it was—is recognized. Six theologians' answers to communism are stated and appraised. Three major thinkers are Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Karl Barth. Of secondary importance are Joseph Hromádka, the Czech; Emil Brunner; and Nicolas Berdyaev. Of the six, Dr. West considers Barth the most creative and realistic.

To American readers this view of Barth will come as a surprise. One of the rewards of the book, although of secondary importance from the author's viewpoint, is this restatement of Barth's social philosophy and his influence on practical action. Dr. West maintains—and supports his views by abundant quotations from Barth's writings—that in the postwar period the Swiss theologian has radically altered his message. He can no longer be accused of retreating from practical reality into an otherworldliness with no constructive guide to action. Barth now encourages, so West maintains, a living and constant encounter with communism no matter how small or inconsequential the situation, and holds out to the responsible Christian, even to those in seemingly hopeless predicaments in the Eastern countries, a sense of freedom and courage to act. The fact that Dr. West is not an adherent of Barth and is aware of his uncritical and limited view of the social sciences adds weight to this appraisal of Barth's significance.

Dr. West has served as teacher and pastor in postwar China and as the representative of the World Council of Churches in Berlin. His writing reflects his firsthand acquaintance with refugees from East Germany, with disillusioned ex-communists, with pastors ministering to bewildered and perplexed Christians in communist countries, with convinced communists, and with the poor and dispossessed. In the context of Dr. West's pragmatic and undogmatic views, cultural contacts and political discussions between Christians and communists at any level and in any situation, no matter how personal, have profound religious import and creative possibilities.

This is indeed the book that has long been needed. It will be read by theologians, but its message should be translated into the language and experience of the perplexed man in the pew, the citizen, and the policy maker.

Introduction to Religious Philosophy by GEDDES MACGREGOR. Houghton Mifflin 1959. 366 pp. $2.95 (paper).

Seldom does one come upon a textbook that makes such good reading as this one. Designed to help students "either to develop a more critical attitude toward the philosophical problems that religion raises, or to appreciate more keenly the nature of religion itself and so approach it with a more lively reverence," it accomplishes these purposes with unusual grace and insight. The style is engaging and vivacious. The contents include a

discussion of various concepts of God; the traditional arguments for belief in God; a long section on immortality; religious knowledge in relation to faith, mysticism, and evil; and a concluding section on religious language. The presentation of various points of view is clear and objective, but, when the topic permits, the author can become persuasive and personal. An extensive bibliography increases the book's usefulness to the instructor.

Corpus Christi by GEDDES MACGREGOR. Westminster 1959. 302 pp. $5.00.

Geddes MacGregor, who came to this country from Scotland, has written a scholarly exposition of the history of the Reformation in England and Scotland, with particular reference to the doctrines which to the Calvinistic churches are essential. Of particular interest to persons concerned with the union of the Episcopal and the Presbyterian churches is the explanation as to why the Church of Scotland gave up the episcopacy and the Church of England retained the episcopal form of church government. This throws light on the current issue which keeps the two denominations apart.

There is also brief discussion of the doctrine of the church in the Middle Ages and in the Lutheran and Separatist traditions. A scholarly and very readable book.

The Renewal of Hope by HOWARD CLARK KEE. Association 1959. 190 pp. $3.50.

The professor of New Testament at Drew Seminary interprets the eschatological passages in the New Testament and relates them to our own time. He tries to show that the otherworldly Christian hope of the ultimate coming of the heavenly Kingdom is not in conflict with Christian social responsibility. He discusses and discards what he considers perversions of the Christian hope—those that retreat in one form or another from human relations and problems. He is convinced that faith in the coming of the Kingdom leads one to face the obligations of reconciliation in areas of conflict or misunderstanding.

Contributors

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